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LECTURES INTRODUCTORY TO  
THE STUDY OF  
THE ACTS, THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES, AND  
THE REVELATION.



# LECTURES

INTRODUCTORY TO THE STUDY OF

THE ACTS, THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES,

AND

THE REVELATION.

BY



WILLIAM KELLY.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE third and concluding series of these Lectures, delivered in London between 21st April and 14th May of this year, and corrected from short-hand notes, is now in the mercy of God brought to a completion. It is hoped that they may serve as a stimulus and help to a comprehensive study of the scriptures surveyed. The inspired history of the church as planted of God here below, as well as of the characteristic ministry of the two great apostles who laboured among the circumcision and the uncircumcision, here passes before us. This is followed by a sketch of the letters of James and of Peter, of John and of Jude. The whole is wound up by a summary view of the grand book of Christian prophecy, which discloses the consequences, under God's government, of the ruin of Christendom up to the end, when God is all in all. May the reader be strengthened of the Spirit all the better to enjoy the rich pasture provided in the exhaustless depths of God's own word!

*Guernsey, 4th December, 1869.*



## CONTENTS.

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### I.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES i.-vii. The starting-point of the dealings of God in the new creation is the risen ascended man Christ Jesus, 1. The title "Acts of the Apostles" only a human one, and far from giving an adequate statement of its contents, 2. Difficulty at first sight to see why the Spirit of God, having shown us Jesus risen and ascended in concluding Luke's gospel, should go over the same ground in the opening of the Acts, 3. The Lord does not act independently in His risen character any more than He did as man here below, 3. Resurrection does not supersede the Holy Ghost, 4. How the Lord met the scant intelligence conveyed in the question about the immediate restoration of the kingdom to Israel, 5. The basis of Christianity, 6. Waiting for the power of the Spirit to act in gift on others, 7. "Ordained to be," 7. Paul not one of the twelve, 8. "They gave forth their lots," 9. Note on the foregoing, 9. The parted tongues showed that God thought of the Gentile as well as of the Jew, 10. The amazement of the multitude, 11. Joel's prophecy and its bearing, 12. Messiah characterized by the most absolute trust in God in life and in death supported by Psalm xvi. 13, and by other psalms, 14. How God opened a way for the acceptance of Messiah when apparently all was lost to Israel, 15. No true repentance unto life without faith, 16. The gift of the Holy Ghost always consequent on faith, never identical with it, 17. True belief goes with true repentance, but the gift of the Holy Ghost consequent on both, 18. *ἀσμένως* (gladly) may be omitted, 18. The apostles' doctrine and fellowship—breaking of bread and prayers, 19. How far did the early believers realize the truth of the one body? 20. Breaking bread at home, 21. The meaning of *σῶζομένους*, 22. "His

servant Jesus," 23. Peter's sermon to the men of Israel, 24; which is an appeal to the nation as such, 25, and individually to the rulers of the people and elders of Israel, 26. Guilty conscience betrays its conscious weakness however wilful, 27; and lack of conscience could not be hid, 27. The meaning of "filled with the Holy Ghost," 28. Possessions laid at the apostles' feet, 29. There is rarely a manifestation of God in the church without a dark shadow accompanying it from the evil one, 29. All sin now is sin against the Holy Ghost, 30. For Christians to use the law is to lower the test of judgment incomparably, 31. Many a thing has been untruly said since the lie of Ananias and Sapphira which has not been judged as theirs was, 32. Power by angelic deliverance and power by men in providence displayed, 33. Persecution and its privileges, 33. Murmurings, 34. The church of God is not a system of rules but a living power, 35. Appointment and choice, 35. Grace while it discerns knows how to rise above evil, 36. Stephen, full of grace and power, 36, sets before the council the prominent facts of Israel's history, 37. Abraham's non-possession, Joseph's rejection, 37, Moses' disappointment, Solomon's insufficient temple-dwelling, 38, all laid to the charge of the Holy Ghost-rejecting Israel, who, filled with rage, stone the witness to their sin, 39. The loud voice and the whisper of the expiring martyr tell each their own tale, 40.

## II.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES viii.-xii. A turning-point in the history of the church, the unfolding of the truth of God, and the manifestation of His ways, 41, in the revelation of Christ as an object for the Christian in heaven and outside the narrow boundaries of Judaism, 42. There is no narrowness in a rejected heavenly Christ, 43. Saul's ruthless and blind persecution, 44. Philip preaches Christ, substantiating his testimony with miracles, 45; which latter attract the attention of the fleshly-minded Simon, 46, for the power attaching thereto, 47. But the power attaching to gifts is subordinate to the possession of a divine Person, 48. The contrast between the first and subsequent bestowals of the Holy Ghost, 49. The free sovereignty of the Holy Ghost accompanied by the greatest care on God's part to maintain unity between the several spheres of His action, 50. The laying on of hands not essential to the bestowal of the Holy Ghost, 51. It was a sign of identification as well as of divine blessing, 52. The tide of blessing begins to flow further from Jerusalem, 53. A man of Ethiopia, 54, hears the word and grace put together, and receiving



light is baptized, and returns to his own country filled with joy, 55, no longer a proselyte to Judaism but a disciple of Jesus, 56. The call of the apostle of the Gentiles, 57. A sudden burst of glory causes Saul to surrender instantly, 57. The mighty effect on his soul, 58. The precious message of the Lord to him through Ananias, 59. He preaches that Jesus is Son of God, 59. The doctrine of the Sonship did not in the smallest degree set aside the Messiahship, 60. An important lesson as to reception, 61. An object of grace can afford to be gracious, 62. Grace can credit grace easily, understands the way of the Lord, and disarms suspicion, 62. Note on "church" or "churches," 63. The progress of the apostle Peter, 64. Cornelius, 65, a converted man before Peter went to him, 66. Had life but not peace, 67, and was by no means ignorant of the word that God had sent to the children of Israel, 68; and so believing God as far as he knew Him, could at least pray for further blessing till it came, 69; and he got, not the truth of the church one body, but that God was meeting Gentiles as well as Jews, 70, and that salvation was the heart understanding deliverance not merely from judgment, but from this present evil world, 71, whereupon the Holy Ghost is given, not by the laying on of hands as at Samaria, 72, but direct from God Himself, and the Gentiles are forthwith baptized with water,—not, however, as a ministerial act, 73. Peter explains this wondrous transaction to those who had not witnessed it, 74. Note on "Ελληνας and 'Ελληνιστάς, 75. How blessed to see the free activity of the Holy Ghost without any kind of communication of man! 76. What a rebuke to those who would make the church a mere creature of government! 77. The wisdom of Barnabas in seeking Saul, and the recognition of a gracious heart among God's instruments, 78. Peter rescued from prison by the prayers of the saints, 79.

APPENDIX TO LECTURE II. Extract from Mr. E. Litton's work on "The Church of Christ in its Idea, Attributes, and Ministry," 80-88.

### III.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES xiii.-xx. The missionary journeys of the apostle Paul, 89. A formal act of separation which is in no way ordination, 89. Ministry and its distinction from official charge, 90. The difference between denying *exclusive* or one-man ministry and upholding a stated ministry, 91. What the church gives the church has a voice in, but what the Lord gives He is the Sovereign disposer of, 92. Also the Holy Ghost can set apart among the servants to a peculiar service, 93. The laying on of hands in the case of Barnabas

and Saul was a fraternal recommendation to the grace of God in the work to which they had been separated by the Holy Ghost, 94. The minister cannot override the church, nor the church rightly control the minister, 95. "John to their minister," what it means, 96. The judicial sentence from the Lord on Elymas the sorcerer, 97. Paul and his company—a word on spiritual influence, 98. The liberty of a Jewish synagogue contrasted with the present narrowness of Christendom to receive the word of truth, 99. John and his unambitious testimony to Messiah, 100. "Raised up Jesus" does not refer to resurrection, 101. The true application of the second psalm to this subject, 102. The hatred which the unbelieving Jews felt to the preaching of the gospel to Gentiles, 103. The scripture which applied to Christ appropriated by the apostles themselves, 104. Christian faith appropriates to itself what is said of Him, 105. Unbelief always flies to influence of some kind, just as faith does to God, 106. The simplicity of grace and the wisdom of patience will always in the end triumph over what men call heroism, 107. Scripture always shows us people dealt with as they are, not all according to one fixed and rigid rule, 108. Truth may be declared sometimes by vindicating God and deprecating what is false, 109. "When they had ordained them," how subversive of the true sense of the passage! 110. Note on *χειροτονήσαντες*, 111. The folly of making elders without a properly-constituted appointing power, as an apostle or his delegate, 112. God does not bestow power in a period of disorder as in a time of order, 113. The louder the vaunt the less real is the claim to ornaments of which God stripped His guilty people, 114. Hindrances brought in by the Judaisers, not to the apostle's work only, but to his doctrine, 115. The matter referred to Jerusalem, 116. Fallacy of the thought that questions were settled by a mere word in apostolic days, 117. Peter preaching Paul's doctrine, 118. James confirms the same, quoting the prophets, 119. Leading men among brethren, 120, who accompany Paul and Barnabas with the letter to the Gentile brethren at Antioch, 121. There is a duty of conferring together on the part of those who labour, 122. Paul choosing Silas as his fellow-labourer is recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God, 123. The first appearance of Timothy on the scene, 124. His circumcision by Paul very remarkable, 125, but a proof how grace can triumph over law, 126. Transactions at Philippi, 127. Opposition to the truth in Europe takes rather the form of patronage, 128. Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, 129. Analysis of Paul's address to the Athenians, 130. Poets in their dreams often stumble over truths beyond themselves,

131. The sudden intervention of the man who, raised from the dead, is going to deal with this habitable earth, 132. The success of the gospel in Corinth, 133. Paul as a tent-maker proscribed by ecclesiastical canons, 133. Apollos helped in the way of God more perfectly by Aquila and Priscilla, 134. The condition of certain believers at Ephesus who had not received the Holy Ghost, 135. There are many souls not at all in liberty, not having received the spirit of adoption, 136. They have looked for something about to come, rather than at that which is come, 137. The definitive usage of the Lord's-day, or the first day of the week, as the fitting time for the breaking of bread, 138. Note on elders and bishops, 138. The marked absence of any reference to succession where it would have been most fitting had it been intended, 139.

## IV.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES xxi.-xxviii. Paul's course from Jerusalem to Rome a remarkable episode in the apostle's history, 140. Seven days' stay, 141. The children of God should if practicable be together every day, 142. Christianity should ramify the whole course of a man's life after he belongs to Christ, 143. Wives and children, 144. Philip's four daughters who prophesied, 145. On the right exercise of a woman's gift, 146. Public preaching of the gospel by women is never contemplated in scripture, 147. Paul in Jerusalem in company with James and the elders, 148. The condition of Jewish and Gentile Christians in the early days of the church, 149. Paul no exception to that patience that could bear with Jewish prejudices, 150. Paul was a man who puts all that have been since his day into the shade, 151. Painfulness of having to touch in any way on that which might seem to reflect on the conduct of the great apostle, 152. The smallest slip of a blessed man like Paul has the greater weight because of his position, 153. What comes of listening to those whose measure is less than the truth of God as revealed, 154. The tumult in the temple precincts, 155. The address in Hebrew narrating his conversion, 156. His claim to Roman citizenship. Modern martyrs in theory, 157. To state a fact which the law recognises is very different to going to law, 158. The injustice of the chiliarch in delivering his prisoner to the Jewish council, 159. A further trait of the uncertainty of the ground the apostle was now treading, 160. Let us beware how we slight the least warning of the Holy Ghost, 161. The object before the apostle in setting party against party in the council was not Christ, 162. The name of Christ is ill-served by making use even of

the most reputable of His adversaries, 163. The Lord has nothing but comfort to administer, even when His servants make mistakes, 164. Lysias' crafty letter, 165. The hired rhetoric of Tertullus, 166. Paul's temperate and frank reply, 167. Felix and Festus, 168. Agrippa and Bernice, 169. Paul's defence before Agrippa, 170. He narrates his conversion, 171. "Delivering thee from the people," &c. does not convey the true sense, 172. Our mission as Christians is not so much against evil as *for good*, 173. If you would effectually help others, you must always be above the motives and ways that sway them, 174. The Roman governor's stigma on the truth, 175. Agrippa's half-wrung confession, 176. The grace and truth of Paul's answer embracing the standing and state of a Christian, 177. Paul's voyage, and the old vigour manifest as soon as he is out of the charmed circle, 178. Kindness of brethren in Italy most refreshing to the apostle's heart, 179. The long-suspended sentence on Israel, 180. Conclusion, 181.

## V.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES. Suddenness of the transition from Paul's to James' writings, 182. Condition of the church at Jerusalem and the early Christians, 183. Luther's rejection of this epistle, 184. Our business is to gather what God has to teach us, 185. This epistle is a final summons to Israelites wherever they might be, 186, and enjoins the manifestation of godliness toward both God and man, 187. Blessing now is not in honour and ease, but contrariwise, 188. God reverses the judgment of the world as to temporary circumstances, 189. Trial of faith and temptation of flesh, 190. Temptation as handled by James and Paul, 191. Haste to solve difficulties is practically a finding fault either with God or with His word, 192. God is not only good, but He is a giver, 193, and a communicator of His own spiritual nature, 194. The link between Peter, James, John, and Paul, 195. Paul and James never contradict each other, because, though they use the same words, they do not treat of the same subjects, 196. The implanted word in contrast to an external law, 197. The law of liberty, 198, and the law of bondage, 199. The will restrained and the will led on, 200. Pure and undefiled religion, what is it? 201. There was to Israel a peculiar danger of taking up the doctrines of Christianity as a system, 202. Human faith cannot save, 203. The works of Abraham and Rahab viewed apart from faith, 204. Bring in faith, and they stand out clothed in the light of heaven, 205. The tongue in private and in public, 206. Little matters pro-

duce great results, 207. James always keeps in mind the practical every-day view of things, 208. Two kinds of wisdom, 209. The wisdom from above is sure of its ground, and needs not to contend, 210. James addresses others besides Christians, 211. New punctuation of a difficult verse, 212. "Saved sinners" not a scriptural expression, 213. We had better get rid of phrases which deserve no better name than religious cant, 214. The forming of resolutions without God deprecated, 215. Heaping treasure *in*, not *for*, the last days, 216. The selfishness that comes into direct personal collision with the Lord of glory, 217. Murmurings, religious asseverations, 218. The oath required by the magistrate, 219. God's discipline governmental, 220. Confession, 221. Conclusion, 222.

## VI.

THE EPISTLES OF PETER. The epistles of Peter, addressed to the elect Jews of his day, maintain whatever there is in common between the Christian and the saints of the Old Testament, 223. The general principles of God are in nowise enfeebled by Christianity, 224. Election always individual in Christianity, 225. Sanctification of the Spirit, 226. Wherever there is a real work of God's Spirit, the sanctification of the Spirit is made good, 227. Sanctification in Peter precedes justification, 228. To confound this with practical holiness upsets the gospel, 229. The gift of the Spirit is not sanctification of the Spirit, 230. The first impulse of a converted man is to do the will of God, 231. We are called to obey as Christ obeyed, 232. That *kind* of obedience, 233. Sprinkling of blood under the law did not imply atonement, 234. The distinction between Peter's and Paul's testimony, 235. We need Christ interceding for us as well as the privilege of being in Christ, 236. A whole Christ is given and needed, 237. Saints are *kept*; for Christian doctrine is not as men so often say—that of saints persevering, 238. As far as unbelief works it is just so far death in effect, 239. The appearing of Jesus, 240. The value of faith at that day, 241. Christianity could not be displayed while Christ was here, 242. It was when He who died went to heaven that Christianity appeared in its full force, 243. How much we are indebted to the Spirit who now reveals a Christ already come, 244. Three distinct truths, 245. Christianity comes between the first and second coming of Christ, 246. The holiness of the Christian is fuller and deeper than that of the Jew could be, 247. Two motives for holiness, 248. Man claims the exercise of a will which he denies to God, 249. What brings a man into peace is the certainty that all



is clear with God, 250. Christianity alone settles all questions, 251, "That ye may grow thereby unto salvation," 252. Two characters of priesthood, 253. Holy and royal priesthood, 254. "Not a people but now a people," 255. It is only a theologian who finds a difficulty, 256. The people of God are called out for heaven, and thus are strangers on earth, 257. Exhortations.—The personal snares of every day, 258. Obedience to God and man, 259. Slaves, wives, husbands, 260. Suffering ought never to be for sin, 261. The spirits in prison, 262. The reason Peter notices Noah's preaching, 263. Salvation never short of nor separate from the power of resurrection, 264. God, while dealing in grace, never abandons righteous government, 265. Liberty of ministry, 266. On speaking in the Church of God, 267. The gift and the ability to use it, 268. The flock of God and its shepherds, 269. "God's heritage" a false rendering, 270, leading people to say "my congregation," etc. 271. The second epistle brings in God's righteous government in its judgment of Christendom or corrupted Christianity, 272. Called by glory and virtue, 273, its signification, 274. The kingdom the main subject of Peter's testimony, 275. Prophecy a lamp for the darkness, 276. What means the "day-star," 277. The light of the lamp is not enough for the Christian, he needs daylight, 278. Mischievous interpretations, 279. Comparison of 2 Peter iii. 3, 280. What is private interpretation? 281. All prophecy runs on to the kingdom of Christ, 282. False teachers in Christendom; Christendom hastening to heathen conclusions, 283. The day of the Lord and the scoffers, 284.

## VII.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN. The characteristic of John's epistles is "Christ in us," 285. "That which was from the beginning," 286. Christ's personal being as man here below, 287. The life was manifested, 288. The expression of eternal life is modified in a saint, 289, but is fully portrayed in Christ, 290. Fellowship with the Son of God, 291. Fulness of joy, 292. A manifestation and a message, 293. The message, 294. God is light in contrast to the contrary notion of heathens, 295. Christianity is a life beyond the law, 296. Walking *in* the light and *according to it*, 297. Every Christian walks *in* the light, 298. Fellowship one with another, 299. A Christian is one who instead of hiding his sins confesses them, 300. The detection of what is contrary to God in us, 301. Restoration founded also on propitiation, 302. The grand characteristic of life in Christ is obedience, 302. Knowing that we know God: what it means, 303. No view of Christ is true that makes Him in that view more precious than He

was when manifested in this world, 304. The difference between keeping God's word and merely doing what is right, 305. Obedience puts God in His place and man down, 306. Love now comes in in connection with obedience as a test of one born of God, 307. Fathers, young men and babes, 308. The two-fold character of antichrist, 309. Righteousness, 310. Manifestation, 311. Without Christ you cannot understand any part of the Bible spiritually, 312. Sin is lawlessness, 313. A translation cannot be correct which contradicts other passages of undoubted holy writ, 314. The common translation of 1 John iii. 4, lowers the sense of what sin is, 315. The family of God and the family of the devil, 316. Every creature lives according to its nature, 317. Righteousness and love combined, 318. The great danger of trifling with the practical consequences of truth, 319. We in Him and He in us, 320. Danger of separating the Holy Spirit from Christ, 321. A test for knowing what is and what is not of the Holy Ghost, 322. There is no evil spirit but what winces at and refuses to endorse the glory of Christ, 323. The difference between what is of the world and what is of God, 324. The word is the test next to the person of Christ, 325. Life and propitiation in our Lord and His work, 326. Intimacy and mutuality, 327. Arminianism and Calvinism both prejudicial to the grace of God, 328. What is meant by dwelling in God, 329. Who is my brother? 330. God concludes as He began in setting forth Christ, 331. How to love God's children, 332. John keeps us fully in the consciousness of our deliverance, but also of our responsibility, 333. The Spirit, the water, and the blood, 334. Sin unto death, 335. The last verses sum up the whole matter, 336. Appendix on 1 John v. 7, 8, 337-347.

### VIII.

THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLES OF JOHN AND JUDE. Why the 2nd Epistle is addressed to a woman, 348. When the glory of Christ is in question everything must give way before it, 349, and then a woman and her children are bound to judge, 350. "The truth" a characteristic point in John's Epistles, 351. How the inspiration has been questioned, 352. The question of utility not to be entertained, 353. Is my soul in communion with God about His own Son? 354. The truth produces truthfulness, 355. The phrase "Jesus Christ come in the flesh" signifies His Deity and humanity, 356. Every false teacher is a deceiver, but he who lowers the glory of Christ is antichrist, 357. No person can take Old Testament ground now that Christianity has been revealed, 358. It is a blessed thing not to be easily moved about

by every wind of doctrine, 359. It is impossible to discover a truth of God that is not in the Bible, 360. The truth is stated comprehensively, for otherwise Satan would alter particular forms of error to save appearances for the simple, 361. Bidding God speed does not convey the sense of *χαίρειν*, 362. It is simply "good morning," 363. The third Epistle presents the positive as the second did the negative side, 364. The third prevents our being too narrow, 365. False teachers invariably select women and children in whom to instil their doctrines, 366. Men characterised by selfishness as women are by warm affection, 367. Both Gaius and the elect lady are loved "in the truth," 368. Stranger brethren, 369. Diotrephes the type of the clerical spirit, 370. Persons having large gift can the more afford to give the fullest scope to the lesser gifts, 371. The key note of the first Epistle is heard right through to the third, 372. The Epistle of Jude. The doubts of those who have compared it with 2nd Peter, 373, betray their incompetence to judge, 374. It is never taught in scripture that the Lord redeemed a heretic or any other man that was not saved, 375. Redemption and purchase by no means the same things, 376, as Calvinists and Arminians each contend, 377. The Epistle of Jude individualizes the saints, 378. The similarity and dissimilarity of this Epistle with 2nd Peter, 379. Peter speaks of unrighteousness—Jude of apostasy, 380. Examples, 381. Peter's breadth and Jude's preciseness, 382. Jude looks at a dealing suited and due to apostates, 383, and urges on the saints grace rather than godliness as Peter does, 384. Making a difference, 385. Reference to Jude's question in John xiv. 22, 386. Remark on the so-called Catholic Epistles, 386. Conclusion, 387.

## IX.

THE REVELATION i.-iii. The moral fitness of John to be the instrument of communicating the closing volume of the New Testament, 388. The position of Christ as a man maintained throughout, 389. Terms in contrast with those used in the gospel, 390. Intervention noticeable on every side, 391. The reason why gathered from Old Testament analogy, 392. John corresponds to Daniel, 393. The word of God in its connexion with what John saw, 394. The Lord's gracious word of encouragement in anticipation of the doubts and cavils of unbelief, 395. The spiritual usage of seven in prophetic scripture, 396. Why the Holy Ghost is described as the seven spirits, 397. To dislocate the New Testament absolutely from the Old, or to see no more than a repetition of the Old in the New, is an almost equal error, 398. God is introduced in Old Testament style and character, but applied



to New Testament subjects. The Holy Ghost also, 399. The voice of the Christian heard exceptionally, 400. The Lord God the Eternal puts His voucher on the book from the beginning, 401. Why the visions were given on the Lord's day, 402. The voice behind, and the voice saying, Come up hither, 403. We are called to walk according to the place and relationships in which we stand, 404. All measured according to God's own mind, 405. A threefold glory, 405. Death and hades, 407. The things that are, 408. What is meant by the angel, 409. The church in Ephesus, 410. Its state, 411. Its decline, 412. Smyrna, 413. The Patristic party, 414. Succession and ordinances become defined as a system about this time, 415. Pergamos, 416. Clericalism and its effects, 417. Nicolaitanism become a doctrine, 418. Thyatira, 419. Jezebel, 420. The remnant in Thyatira, 421. Associated with Christ in His kingdom, 422. Sardis, 423. Protestantism, 424. Luther never clear in his soul about justification by faith, 425. Romanists ignorant of the Bible, 426. Infidelity and superstition allied, 427. Philadelphia, 428. A re-commencement, 429, formed after a rejected Christ, 429. The synagogue of Satan, 431. The hour of temptation, 432. Only escaped by removal from the scene altogether, 433. Laodicea, 434. Half-hearted neutrality about Christ, 435. Gold and white raiment, 436.

## X.

THE REVELATION iv.-xi. 18. Resumé of seven churches, 437. From chap. iv. onward we find no longer a church condition on earth, 438. The thousands of books written on Revelation, from the Patristic age downwards, never mention this till a comparatively recent date, 439. No merely human intelligence can interpret the Bible, 440. The church is not properly speaking the subject of prophecy, 441. The throne in Heb. iv. and Rev. iv. contrasted, 442. The four and twenty elders, 443. "The dead in Christ," 444. The judicial characteristics of the throne, 445. The sea of glass a symbol of fixed purity, 446. Who are the living creatures? 448. The Lamb presented for the first time in this scene, 449. The seven-sealed roll, 450. Why angels are absent in chap. iv. and present in chap. v., 451, explained, 452. The opening of the seals, 453. The white horse, the red horse, 454, the black horse, 455, the pale or livid horse, 456. The souls under the altar cry, 456. The answer to that cry, 457. The earliest and latest persecutions brought together, 458. Symbols and plain language contrasted, 459. False conclusions about the day of judgment under the sixth seal, 460. The sealing of one hundred and forty-four thousand, 461, and a crowd

of Gentiles without number, 461, reserved for blessing on the earth, 462. The gospel of the kingdom, 463. "Before the throne of God" describes character, 464. The seventh seal, 465. Everything is angelic under the trumpets, 466. The meaning of "the third part" in the prophecy, 467. The second, third, and fourth angels, 468. The woe-trumpets, 469. The first two—the locusts and the Euphratean horsemen—have a correspondence to the sealed-remnant and saved-Gentile companies, 470. A parenthesis between the sixth and seventh trumpets corresponding to a similar one between the sixth and seventh seals, 471. The mystery of God is His present seeming inaction as to government, 472. The little book, why little and open, 472. The two witnesses, 473, an adequate testimony in those days, 474, who are preserved in spite of the beast till their work is done, 475, after which their unburied corpses lie in the Broadway of Jerusalem, 476. The seventh trumpet, 476. The advent of the world-kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, 477. Conclusion, 478.

## XI.

THE REVELATION xi. 19.-xvi. The commencement of what may be called the second volume of the Revelation, 479. The temple of God open—The resumption of the old links with His ancient people Israel, 480. The ark of His covenant is the sign of the unfailing certainty of that to which God bound Himself, 481. Israel's threefold symbol of authority, 482. What constitutes the Roman Empire, 483. Explanation of the woman and her male child, 484. Why introduced here, 485, and no mention of aught save birth and rapture, 486, all a mystical representation of Christ's relations with Israel and of His removal out of the scene, 487, the church also, 488. The ejection of Satan from heaven, 489, and his efforts to destroy the saints on the earth, 490. Two leaders introduced to catch a twofold class of men, 491. These are the two beasts; the first civil power, the second religion, and both apostate, 492. Why called beasts, 493. The revival of the Roman Empire, 494. The man of sin, 495, a trinity of evil, 496. What Christendom is hastening to, 497. Dwellers on the earth, 498. The second beast, 499. The locality of each beast, 500. The meaning of the two horns, 501. Popery is more *anti-church* than *anti-christ*, 502. The second beast claims to be the Jehovah-God of Israel, 503. The number of the beast, 504. Its application to the first rather than the second beast, 505. What God does with His own in these scenes, 506. The everlasting gospel, why so called, 507, not to be confounded with the gospel now preached, 508. It is the universal mes-

sage of God to man and connected with His creation glory, 509. Fear God and give glory to Him, 510. God about to pour a judicial delusion on Christendom, 511. Intelligence and its evils, 512. Identity of the everlasting gospel with the gospel of the kingdom, 513. Four warnings and a declaration, 514. The harvest and vintage of the earth, 515, thus forming seven distinct acts in which God will interfere in the way of forming a testimony, 516. Another sign connected with the previous one in chap. xii., 516. The sea of glass mingled with fire, 517. Which saints will pass through the tribulation, 518. "King of nations" not "King of saints," 519. The seven last plagues, 520. The whole apostate sphere smitten, and not the Roman earth merely, 521. The gathering to Armagedon, 522. Conclusion, 523.

## XII.

THE REVELATION xvii.-xxii. Babylon and the beast, 524, or corruption and violence, 525, cannot be referred to pagan Rome or to Jerusalem, 526,—for the full explanation of the prophecy we must look onward to the latter day, 527, rather than to Romanism, although there is a measure of analogy, 528,—or Babylon in Chaldea, 529. The mystery of good and the mystery of evil, 530. Christ has not only a supreme but an exclusive place, 531. The prophet's amazement at the mystery, 532. The time is coming when power will cease to be ordained of God, 533. A great reversal of man's history and political maxims, 534. The resurrection of an empire by the power of Satan, 535. The ten kingdoms, 536. A partial application of the prophecy justified, 537. Necessity of the ten kings getting their power at the same time as the beast, 538. Constitutionalism, 539. The balance of power, 540. The revived Latin empire will destroy Babylon, 541, in order to leave itself a clear field, 542. Nothing but Rome answers to "the woman," 543. Civilization and what it comprises, 544. Why God visits with such severity at the close, 545. The day of the Lord on the world in no way sets aside His judgment on individual souls, 546. A mysterious lawlessness, which not merely embraces Christian times, but the end of the age after the church has gone, 547. The bride, 548. Righteousnesses, 549. The guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb, 550. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus, 551. Heaven opened for the exit of Christ Himself, 552. Who those are who follow the Lamb out of heaven, 553. Judgment in the hand of Christ, 554. The end of the beast and the false prophet, 555. The first resurrection, 556. Who are the persons invested with judicial authority? 557. Three classes of martyrs, 558. The first resurrection

does not mean all rising at the same moment, 559. The term "the last day" does not mean a specific moment of time, 560. At the conclusion of the 1000 years Satan reappears on the scene, 561, and the righteous and the wicked form two distinct arrays, 562, and now there is one throne, Christ judges the dead, 563. The age of visible glory inefficacious to change the heart of man, 564. Extraordinary increase of population in the millennial day, 565, and extension of man's present natural life, 566. The book of life, 567. Death and hades terminated, 568. The tabernacle of God with men, 569. The Lamb's wife contrasted with the great harlot, 570, and used for blessing as the harlot had been used for mischief, 571. The city the holy vessel of divine power for governing the earth during the millennium, 572. Paul will not be forgotten although his name be not among the twelve, 573. The heavenly city needs not, as the earthly, a temple as a means of communication, 574. The nations (not "of them that are saved") shall walk in the light of it, 575. Admonitions, 576. To the Christian this book is not sealed, 577. It is Christ who says, "I come *quickly*." The church says, "Come," 578, and so can the feeblest believer, be he ever so unintelligent, 579. Conclusion, 580.

# INTRODUCTORY LECTURES

ON

THE ACTS, THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES, AND  
THE REVELATION.

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I.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

Chaps. i.-vii.

FIRST of all we see man in an entirely new place—man risen from among the dead and ascending to heaven. The risen ascended man, Christ Jesus, is the new starting-point of the dealings of God. The first man afforded the great and solemn and saddening lesson of human responsibility. The cross had just closed the history of the race; for Jesus in no way shrank from all that was connected with the creature responsible here below, but met it to God's glory. He alone was capable of doing all; He alone solved every question; and this as a perfect man, but not a perfect man only, because He was very God. Thus was glory brought to His Father all through His life,—to God as such in His death; and glory to God not merely as one who was putting man to the test, but who was removing from before His face the root and the fruits of sin;

for this is the wonderful specialty of the death of the Lord Jesus, that, in Him crucified, all that had hindered, all that had dishonoured God, was for ever met, and God infinitely more and after a better sort glorified than if there never had been sin at all.

Thus on the setting aside of the old creation, the way was clear for man in this new place; and we shall see this in the blessed book before us—the Acts of the Apostles, although I am far from meaning that the title is an adequate statement of its contents: it is but its human name, and man is not capable even of giving a name. It is a book of deeper and more glorious purpose than acts of the apostles could be, however blessed in their place. Flowing down from the risen man in heaven, we have God Himself displaying fresh glory, not merely *for* but *in* man, and this so much the more because it is no longer a perfect man on earth, but the working of the Holy Ghost in men of like passions as ourselves. Nevertheless, through the mighty redemption of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Ghost is able to come down holily and righteously, willing in love to take His place, not merely in the earth, but in that very race that had dishonoured God down to the cross of Christ, when man could go no lower in scorn and hatred of that one man who in life and death has thus changed all things for God and for us.

Accordingly this first chapter, and more particularly the verses (1–11) that I have read, show us the groundwork, by no means unconnected with all that follows, but the most fitting introduction, as the facts were the necessary basis of it; and this the more strikingly



because at first sight no man perhaps could have understood it thus. Indeed I doubt that any believer could have scanned this until there was a fair measure of intelligence in the revealed truth of God. And I do not mean merely now that truth which, being received, constituted him a believer, but the large infinite truth which it is the object of the Holy Ghost to bring out in this book as also throughout the New Testament. At first sight many an one may have found a difficulty why it was that the Spirit of God, after having in the gospel of Luke shown us Jesus risen and Jesus ascended, should take it up again in the beginning of the Acts. If we have had such questions, we may at least learn this lesson, that it is wise and good, yea, the only sound wisdom for us, and that which pleases our God, to set it down as a fixed maxim that God is always right, that His word never says a thing in vain, —that if He appear to repeat, it is in no way repetition after a human infirm sort, but with a divine purpose; and as the resurrection and the ascension too were necessary to complete the scheme of truth given us in the gospel of Luke, so the risen man ascending to heaven was necessary to be brought in again as a starting-point by the very same writer, when God gives by him this new unfolding of the grace and ways of God in man.

We see then the Lord Jesus risen from the dead. We have the remarkable fact that He does not act independently of the Holy Ghost in His risen character any more than as man here below. In short, He is man, although no longer in that life which could be laid down but risen again; and the blessedness of man

always is to act and speak by the Holy Ghost. So with the Lord Jesus, until the day in which He was taken up, it is said, after that He, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen. Resurrection does not supersede the Holy Ghost. The action of the Holy Ghost may be very different in resurrection, but there is still the blessedness of the power of the Spirit of God working by Him even though risen from the dead. It is not only that the disciples needed the Spirit of God, but that Jesus was pleased still through the Holy Ghost to deal with us so. But this is not all. Assembled with them, He explains that the Holy Ghost was to be given to themselves, and this not many days hence. It was the more important to state this great truth, because He had said a short time before "Receive ye the Holy Ghost;" and the ignorance that is natural to us might have used the words in John xx. to deny the further power and privilege that was about to be conferred in the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. They were both of the deepest importance. It is not for us to compare for our preference. But of this I am persuaded, that to have the Holy Ghost according to the Lord's words on the resurrection-day has its own blessedness as decidedly as the gift of the Holy Ghost sent down from above: the one being more particularly that which forms the intelligence of the new man; the other, that power which goes forth in testimony for the blessing of others. I need not say the order too was perfect,—not in power for others first, but as spiritual intelligence for our own souls. We are not fit vessels for the good of others until God has given us divine



consciousness of a new being according to Christ for ourselves.

But there is more still. It was necessary too that they should know the vast change. Their hearts, spite of the blessing, had little realized the ways of God that were about to open for them. Thus not only do we hear the Lord intimating that the promise of the Father must be poured out upon them, but further, even after this, they asked Him whether He was at this time about to restore again the kingdom to Israel. This furnishes, as our foolish questions often do, the inlet for divine instruction and guidance. We need not always repress these enquiries from the Lord: it is well to let that which is in the mind come out, especially if it be to Him. Nor must His servants be impatient even at the curious questions of those that least understand; for the importance is not so much in that which is asked as in the answer. Certainly this was ever the case with our Lord and the disciples. "It is not for you," says He, "to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own authority, but ye shall receive power." The measures and the fit moments that had to do with earthly changes were in the sole control of Him to whom all belonged. "But ye shall receive power" (for the two words are different), "after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me." It was not the time for the kingdom in the sense of manifested power; and this was in their desires. The kingdom in a mysterious form no doubt there is, and we are translated into it; and it is in the power of the Spirit. But emphatically it was to be a time of testimony till He returns in glory.

Such is our place. Blest perfectly according to all the acceptance of Christ exalted in the glory of God, our business is to be witnesses to Him. And so the Lord tells the apostles, "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Then we have the finishing touch, if one may so say, to this introduction. The Lord ascends to heaven, but not with whirlwind nor with chariot of fire. It is not simply that He was not, for God took Him, as is said of Enoch, but in a way more suitable to His glory it is written here that "he was taken up, and a cloud" (the special token of the divine presence) "received him out of their sight."

While they looked steadfastly toward heaven, they hear from the angels who stood by them in white, that this Jesus that was taken up from them should thus come in like manner as they had beheld Him going into heaven.

Thus the only true foundation is laid, and heaven becomes the point of departure—not the earth, nor the first man, but the second man, the last Adam, from the only place that was suitable for Him according to the counsels of God. Such is the basis of Christianity. Altogether vain and impossible, had not redemption been accomplished, and a redemption by blood and in the power of resurrection. Redemption *in se* does not give us the full height and character of Christianity: man risen, and ascended to heaven, after the full expiation of sins on the cross, is necessary to its true and complete expression.

A further scene follows, by no means possible to be absent without a blank for the spiritual understanding. It must be proved manifestly that God had given even now a new place of blessing, and a new power too, or spiritual competency, to the disciples. At the same time they would have to wait for power of the Spirit in gift to act on others. Accordingly we see the disciples together, "continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication;" and in those days Peter stands up, and brings before them the gap made in the apostolic body by the apostasy and death of Judas. Observe how he brings out with an altogether unwonted force the scripture that applied to the case. This was in virtue, not of the promise of the Father for which they were waiting, but of that which they had already from Jesus risen from the dead. Hence without delay the disciples proceed to act. Peter says, "Of these men which have companioned with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be a witness with us of his resurrection."

It will be noticed that the words "ordained to be" are left out. Every one ought to be aware indirectly, if not from his own knowledge, that there is nothing in Greek to represent them. There is not, and there never was, the smallest pretence of divine authority for their insertion. It is hard to say how godly men endorsed so pure an interpolation—with what object can be easily surmised: it does not require a word from me.

"And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas,

who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias." For these two had qualifications, as far as man knew, suitable to the requirements for an apostle, being the companions of the earthly path of the Lord Jesus. They had seen Him risen from the dead. Unable to judge between them definitely, the rest spread the matter before the Lord who must choose His own apostle. The mode of the disciples in this case, it is true, might seem peculiar to us; but I have no doubt that they were guided of the Lord. There is no reason from scripture to believe that Peter and the others acted hastily, or were mistaken. The Spirit of God in this very book sanctions the choice that was made that day, and never alludes to Paul as the necessary twelfth apostle. To do so would be, in my judgment, to weaken if not to ruin the truth of God. Paul was not one of the twelve. It is of all consequence that he should be permitted to retain a special place, who had a special work. All was wisely ordered.

Here then they prayed, and said, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen." Man never chooses an apostle; apostles did not, could not, elect an apostle: the Lord alone chose. And so they gave forth their lots after a Jewish fashion. The twelve apostles were clearly, as it seems to me, in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel, "and they gave forth their lots." This was sanctioned of God in the Old Testament when Israel was before Him; it will be sanctioned of God when Israel returns on the scene in the latter day. No doubt, when the assembly of God was in being, the lot disappears; but the assembly of God was not yet formed. All would

be in order in due time. "They gave forth their lots; \* and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." We shall find a little later, yet before Paul appears, that "the twelve" are recognised. So says the Spirit of God.

But now, when the day of Pentecost was running its

\* The true reading, as attested by  $\aleph$ , A, B, C, D (corr.), and many ancient versions, is  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$  (not  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\nu$ , as in D, E, the mass of cursives, &c.). The meaning is, "they gave lots for them." This meets the chief reasoning founded on the common text which Mosheim urges with his usual force against the view in which, he confesses, all the commentators agree (*i.e.*, in representing Matthias as having been chosen an apostle by lot, agreeably to the ancient Jewish practice). It is evidently of no consequence who they were that set forth or appointed ( $\epsilon\sigma\tau\eta\sigma\alpha\nu$ ) the two: some, like Alford, arguing that the whole company thus produced them; others, like Mosheim, contending that it must in all propriety have been the eleven apostles. I think that the vagueness of the phrase, without a defined subject, shows that the stress laid on either side is a mistake. It suffices to say, that two candidates were brought forward, possessed, as far as either apostles or disciples could say, of adequate qualifications. The Lord alone could decide: to Him all looked after the manner so familiar to the people of God. But Mosheim's conclusion destroys the whole point, besides doing violence to the text by confounding  $\kappa\lambda\eta\rho\omicron\varsigma$  "lot" with  $\psi\eta\phi\omicron\varsigma$  vote or suffrage. It would bring in man's will and voice where the prayer just offered was an abandonment of it for the intervention of the heart-searching God. This, no doubt, was natural to one who was swayed by Lutheran prejudice, and strengthened by the practice which undoubtedly prevailed (from the third century at latest), the assembly deciding by suffrage, not by lot, between the candidates proposed by those who took the lead in their affairs. There seems little difficulty in understanding a Hebraistic extension of the word "gave" (1 Sam. xiv. 41) for the more common "cast"; and as to the pronoun, it is as intelligible and correct in the dative, as in the genitive it is perplexing in sense, and, I think, inaccurate in form; for the article would be requisite with the substantive if it were the true reading. Compare J. L. Moshmii de rebus Christianorum ante Const. M. Comm. Saec. Pr. § xiv. pp. 18-80.

course, they were all with one accord together; for God put the disciples in waiting in the attitude of expectation and prayer and supplication before Him. It was good that they should feel their weakness; and this was indeed the condition of true spiritual power, as it always is for the soul (if not for testimony, certainly for the soul). "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The manner of the Holy Spirit's appearing thus it is well to notice. It was exactly adapted to the intent for which He was given. It was not, as in the gospels, a testimony to the grace of the Lord, although nothing but grace could have given Him to man. It was not, as we find it afterwards in the Revelation, where mention is made of the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. The tongues were parted; for it was not a question of people being now made to speak of one lip. God was meeting man where he was,—not setting aside the ancient judgment of his pride, yet graciously condescending to man, and this to mankind as they were. It was no sign of government, still less of government limited to a special nation. The parted tongues clearly showed that God thought of the Gentile as of the Jew. But they were "as of fire;" for the testimony of grace was none the less founded on righteousness. The gospel is intolerant of evil. This is the wonderful way in which God now speaks by the Holy Ghost. Whatever the mercy of God, whatever the



proved weakness, need, and guilt of man, there is not nor can be the least compromise of holiness. God can never sanction the evil of man. Hence the Spirit of God was thus pleased to mark the character of His presence, even though given of the grace of God, but founded on the righteousness of God. God could afford fully to bless. It was no derogation from His glory; it was after all but His seal on the perfectness of the work of the Lord Jesus. Not only did He show His interest for man, and His grace to the evil and lost, but, above all, His honour for Jesus. There is no title nor ground so secure for us. There is no spring of blessing that we are entitled so to boast of as the Lord: there is none that so delivers from self.

At this time too there were dwelling at Jerusalem men from all nations, we may say, generally speaking, under heaven—"Jews, devout men." And when it was noised abroad that the Holy Ghost had thus been given to the congregated disciples "the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all of these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libyæ about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth

this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new (or sweet) wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem." For he first addresses them on a narrower ground than that into which he afterwards branches out, and both with a wisdom that is not a little striking. Here he is about to apply a portion of the prophecy of Joel. It will be seen that the prophet takes exactly the same limited ground as Peter does. That is, the Jews, properly so called, and Jerusalem, stand in the foreground of Joel's prophecy: so admirably perfect is the word of God even in its smallest detail.

The point he insists on, it will be noticed, was this—that the wonder then before them in Jerusalem was after all one for which their own prophets ought to have prepared them. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." He does not say that it was the *fulfilment* of the prophet. Men, divines, have so said, but not the Spirit of God. The apostle simply says, "This is that which was spoken." Such was its character. How far it was to be then accomplished is another matter. It was not the excitement of nature by wine, but the heart filled with the Spirit of God, acting in His own power and in all classes. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in



heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." There he stops, as far as Joel is concerned.

Then, verse 22, he addresses them as "men of Israel," not merely of Judæa and Jerusalem, but now breaking out into the general hopes of the nation, he at the same time proves their common guilt. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."

And this the apostle supports by what David had spoken in Psalm xvi.: "I foresaw the Lord always before my face." The same psalm affords the clearest proof that the Messiah (and no Jew could doubt that the Messiah was in question there) would be characterised by the most absolute trust in God through all His life; that He was to lay down His life with trust in God just as unbroken and perfect in death as in life; and finally that He would stand in resurrection. It is the psalm therefore of confidence in God that goes right through life, death, resurrection. It was seen in Jesus, and clearly not applicable to David its

writer. Of all whom a Jew could have put forward to claim the language of such a psalm, David would have been perhaps the uppermost one in their hearts. But it was far beyond that famous king, as Peter argued: "Men [and] brethren,\* let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."

Thus the fresh and notorious facts as to Jesus, and no one else, completely agreed with this inspired testimony to the Messiah. Nor was it confined to a single portion of the Psalms. "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." But David is not ascended into the heavens. Thus Peter cites another psalm to show the necessary ascension of Messiah to sit at the right hand of Jehovah, just as much as he had shewn resurrection to be predicted of Him as of no other; "for he says himself, Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool." Who was the man that sat at God's

\* It may be well to guard the English reader from supposing that two classes are intended. The phrase is literally "men-brethren," and means simply men who were brethren.—Let me add, that the true text in the last clause of verse 30 is simply, "to seat from the fruit of his loins on his throne."

right hand? Certainly none could pretend it was David, but his Son, the Messiah; and this entirely corresponded with the facts the apostles had beheld personally. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Thus the proof was complete. Their psalms found their counterpart in the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus the Messiah. God had made Him "both Lord and Christ;" for here the testimony is very gradual, and the wisdom of God in this we may well admire and profit by. In meeting the Jews, God condescended to put forth the glory of His own Son in the way that most of all attached itself to their ancient testimonies and to their expectations. They looked for a Messiah. But apparently all was lost; for they had refused Him; and they might have supposed that the loss was irretrievable. Not so: God had raised Him from the dead. *He* had shown Himself therefore against what they had done; but their hope itself was secure in the risen Jesus, whom God had made to be Lord and Christ. Jesus, spite of all that they had done, had in nowise given up His title as the Christ; God had made Him such. After they had done their worst, and He had suffered His worst, God owned Him thus according to His own word at His own right hand. Other glories will open there too; but Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, as Paul says, was to be raised from the dead according to his gospel. Timothy was to remember this; and Paul can descend to show the connection of the glorious person of the Lord Jesus with the Jew on earth, as he loved for his own relationship

to behold Him in heavenly glory. Thus the link with the expectations of the earthly people, though broken by death, is reset for ever in resurrection.

Surprised, grieved, alarmed to the heart by that which Peter had thus forcibly brought before them, they cry to him and the other apostles, "Men [and] brethren, what shall we do?" This gives the opportunity for the apostle to set out in the wisdom of God a very weighty application of the truth for the soul that hears the gospel: "Repent," says he, which is a far deeper thing than compunction of heart. This they had already, and it leads to that which he desired for them: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." There is no true repentance unto life without faith. But it is according to God that repentance is put forward here rather than faith. The Jews had the testimony of the gospel, as well as the law; and now it had been pressed on them by Peter. Because they believed that testimony, brought home to their consciences, as we have seen, their hearts were filled with sorrow.

But the apostle lets them know that there is a judgment of self that goes far below any outburst of grief,—any consciousness and hatred, even of the deepest act of evil, as undoubtedly the crucifying of Jesus was. Repentance is the abandonment of self altogether, the judgment of what we are in the light of God. And this was to be marked, therefore, not only by the negative sign of giving themselves up as altogether evil before God, but by receiving the rejected and crucified man, the Lord Jesus. Hence, to be baptized each one

of them in His name for the remission of sins follows ;  
“and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

This, therefore, is entirely distinct from faith or repentance. Believing, they had of necessity a new nature they had life in Christ ; but receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost is a privilege and power beyond ; and in this case it was made to be attendant on one's being baptized as well as repenting, because in Jews it was of the utmost moment that they should give a public witness that all the rest and confidence of their souls lay in Jesus. Having been guilty of crucifying the Lord, He must be manifestly the object of their trust. And so it was that they were to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

But indeed this gift is always consequent on faith—never identical with it. This is as sure as it is important to assert and to insist on, as well as to believe. It is no question of notion or tradition, the subject of which runs in quite another direction. I do not even allow it to be an open question, nor a matter of opinion ; for plainly in every instance of each soul, of whom Scripture speaks, there *is* an interval however short. The gift of the Holy Ghost follows faith, and is in no way at the same instant, still less is it the same act. It supposes faith already existing, not unbelief ; for the Holy Ghost, though He may quicken, is never *given* to an unbeliever. The Holy Ghost is said to seal the believer ; but it is a seal of *faith*, and not of unbelief. The heart is opened by faith, and the Holy Ghost is given by the grace of God to those that believe, not in order to their believing. There is no such thing as the Holy Ghost given in order to believe.



He quickens the unbeliever, and is given to the believer. Although we do not hear of faith in the passage, yet from the fact that the converted only were called on to repent, we know that they must have believed. True believing necessarily goes along with true repentance. The two things are invariably found together; but the gift of the Holy Ghost is consequent on them both.

And so the apostle explains. He says, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." His words seem to carry a sense beyond Israel: how far he entered into the force of them himself it is not perhaps for any of us to say. We know that afterwards, when Peter was called upon to go to the Gentiles, he found difficulties. It is hard to suppose, therefore, that he fully understood his own words. However this may be, the words were according to God, whether or not fully appreciated by Peter when he uttered them. God was going to gather out of the Jews themselves and their children, but, more than that, "those that were afar off, as many as the Lord our God should call."

And then we have the beautiful picture that the Spirit of God gives us of the scene that was now formed by His own presence here below. "Then they that [gladly]\* received his word were baptized: and the

\* It appears to me that ἀσμένως, "gladly," was inserted in the commonly received text against the best testimony, as well as internal reasons. For the great uncials (Σ, A, B, C, D, &c.), supported by the Vulgate and Aethiopic, omit the word, which was probably suggested by chap. xxi. 17, where it falls in as admirably as here it sounds somewhat out of season. Nearly the same authorities concur in omitting καί, "and," between "the fellowship" and "the breaking of bread." This serves to strengthen the view that "the fellowship" goes with "the teaching of the apostles," though put as two objects

same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." They were added to the original nucleus of disciples, and "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, [and] in breaking of bread and prayers."

Thus, after being brought into the new association, there arose a need of instruction; and the apostles were pre-eminently those that God vouchsafed in the infant days of His assembly. Inasmuch as it was of the utmost importance that all should be thoroughly established in the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, they had a place peculiar to themselves, as above all others chosen of the Lord to lay the foundation of His house, and to direct and administer in His name, as we see through the New Testament. And then as the fruit of it, and specially connected, there was "the fellowship" of which we next read. Next followed the breaking of bread, the formal expression of Christian fellowship, and the special outward sign of remembering Him to whose death they owed all. Finally, but closely following the Lord's supper, come "the prayers," which still showed that, however great might be the grace of God, they were in the place of danger, and needed dependence here below.

"And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common." This peculiar feature is found in Jerusalem, beautiful and blessed in its season, but, I have no doubt, special to the Jeru-

instead of being combined by a single article in one idea; and it would throw the breaking of bread and the prayers similarly together.

saalem condition of the church of God. We can easily understand it. In the first place all that composed the church were at that time in the same place. We can feel readily, therefore, that there would be a real and strong family feeling, but I doubt whether their mutual affections then rose higher than the sense of their being God's family. They really did constitute the body of Christ; they were baptized by one Spirit into one body; but to be that one body, and to know that such they were, are two very different things. The development was reserved for another and still weightier witness of the glory of the Lord Jesus. But having in its strength the sense of family relationship, the wonderful victory of grace over selfish interests was the fruit of it. If he or she belonged to the household of God, this was the governing thought—not one's own possessions. Grace gives without seeking a return; but grace on the other side seeks not its own things, but those of Christ.

Another trait is, that all savoured of divine as well as family life. The breaking of bread every day, for instance, was clearly a striking witness of Christ ever before their hearts, though also a kindred effect of the same feeling. Thus they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as one might have need.

And they "continued daily with one accord in the temple." This is another peculiarity. There was by no means as yet a manifest severance of the tie with Judaism, at least with the circumstances of its worship. We know that in principle the cross does make a breach, and an irreparable one, with all that is of the first man; but the power of old habits with the joy that overflowed



their souls made them for the moment to be, I may say, better Jews. There was that now within which was far stronger liquor than had ever filled the old skins of the law, and these were sure to be broken in no long time. But for the present nothing was farther from the disciples' minds: they continued daily with one accord in the temple. Along with it was joined this new element—breaking bread at home; not “from house to house,” as if it were a migratory service. There is no real ground to infer that they shifted the scene of the Lord's supper from one place to another. This is not the meaning. The margin is correct. They broke bread at home, in contrast with the temple. It might be the very same house in which the breaking of bread always took place. They would naturally choose the most suitable quarters, which combined convenience as to distance with commodiousness in receiving as many brethren and sisters as possible.

Thus these two features were seen to meet together in the Pentecostal church—the retaining of Jewish religious habits in going up to the temple for prayer, and at the same time the observance of that which was properly Christian—the breaking of bread at home. No wonder the new-found joy overflowed, and they were found “eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.” There is no reason to confound the breaking of bread with eating their meat. They are two different things. We find the religious life, so to speak, expressed in their going up to the temple, and in their breaking bread at home. We find the effect upon their natural life in their “eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising

God, and having favour with all the people." There is the same double character.

"And the Lord added to the church," or "*together*," (for there is a fair question that may be raised as to the text in this last clause) "daily such as should be saved," or those that God was about to separate from the destruction that was impending over the Jewish nation, and, further, to bring by a blessed deliverance into the new Christian estate. The word *σωζομένων* does not express the full character of Christian salvation which was afterwards known. Of course we know that they were saved; but this is not what the word in itself means. It is simply that the Lord was separating those that were to be saved. The English version gives it on the whole very justly. Carefully remember that the meaning is not that they were saved then. The phrase in Luke has nothing to do with that question; it refers simply to persons destined to salvation without saying anything farther.

In the next chapter (iii.) a miracle is related in detail, which brought out the feelings of the people, especially as represented by their leaders (chap. iv.). In going up to the temple, (for the apostles themselves went there,) Peter and John met with a man that was lame; and as he asked for alms Peter gave him something better (as grace, poor in this world's resources and estimate, always loves to do so). He tells the expecting man, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." The man instantly rises, according to the power of God, and is found with them, "walking,

and leaping, and praising God ; and all the people saw him."

This arrests universal attention, and Peter preaches a new discourse—that which has been justly enough called a Jewish sermon. It is thus evident that his indication of the Christian place of blessing in the chapter before (ii.) does not hinder him from setting before the men of Israel (for so he addressed them here), first, their awful position by the rejection of Jesus, and, next, the terms that God in His grace sets before them in answer to the intercession of Christ. "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his"—not "son," but—"servant Jesus." We know Him (and the Spirit of God, who wrote this book, infinitely better knew Him) to be the Son of God. But we must always hold to what God *says* ; and the testimony of God did not yet—and especially in dealing with the Jews—set forth all the glory of Christ. It was gradually brought out ; and the more that man's unbelief grew, so much the more God's maintenance of the Lord's glory was manifested. And so, if they had with scorn refused Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go,—if they had denied the Holy One and Just, and desired a murderer to be granted,—if they had killed the Prince [leader, originator] of life, whom God raised from the dead, they had simply shown out what they were. On the other hand, His name, through faith in His name, (and they were witnesses of its power,) had made this man strong, whom they saw and knew : "Yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And

now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled."

And then he calls upon them to repent, and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out, so that times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord. "And he shall send Jesus Christ, who was fore-appointed for you : whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." God has accomplished His word by Moses the prophet ; for Moses in no way took the place of being the deliverer of Israel, but only a witness of it, a partial exemplification of God's power then, but looking onward to the great Prophet and Deliverer that was coming. Now He was come ; and so Peter sets before them, not only the coming, the Blesser's arrival and rejection in their midst, but the awfulness of trifling with it. Whoever would not bow to Him was to be cut off by their own Moses's declaration : "Every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people." And so it was that all the prophets had testified of those days : and they were the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with their fathers, saying unto Abraham, "And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." The Seed was now come. It was for them, therefore, to declare themselves. Alas ! they had already set up their will against Him ; but at His intercession (what grace !) God was willing to par-

don it all, did they but repent and be converted for the blotting out of their sins.

Thus we have here an appeal to the nation as such; for in all this it will be observed he does not speak a word to them of the Lord Jesus as Head of the church. We have no hint of this truth yet to anybody. Nay, we have not Jesus spoken of even in the same height as in the preceding chapter ii. We have Him in heaven, it is true, but about to return and bring in earthly power, blessing, and glory, if Israel only turned with repentance to Him. Such was the testimony of Peter. It was a true word; and it remains true. When Israel shall turn in heart to the Lord, He who secretly works this in grace will return publicly to them. When they shall say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah," the Messiah will come in fulness of blessing. The heavens will retain Him no more, but give Him up who will fill earth as well as heaven with glory. No word of God perishes: all abides perfectly true.

Meanwhile other and deeper counsels have been brought to light by the unbelief of Israel. This unbelief comes out in no small measure in the next chapter, which follows but might properly have formed a part of chapter iii.; for in sense it is a continuous subject. "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." Then, on the

morrow, we have the council; and Peter, being by the chiefs demanded by what power or name they had wrought the deed, filled with the Holy Ghost, answers, "Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all," (he is throughout bold and uncompromising) "and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Thus again reference is made to their own testimonies. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Unscrupulous as they were, they were thus confounded by the calm confidence with which the truth armed the apostles; and the more so, because their tone and language gave evidence that, whatever the power of the Holy Ghost wrought, it did not set aside their condition as illiterate men. Their words, &c., bore no polish of the schools; and truth spurns, as it needs not, dialectic subtlety. This magnified, therefore, the power of God so much the more, as man's skill was null. But at the same time there was the witness of the miracle that had been done. In presence, then, of the apostles clothed with the irresistible might of the Lord, and of the man whose healing silently attested it even as to the body, they could only command them to go aside, while they conferred together. A guilty con-



science betrays its conscious weakness, however wilful. God invariably gives sufficient testimony to condemn man. He will prove this in the day of judgment; but it is certain to our faith now. He is God, and cannot act below Himself when it is a question of His own revelation.

On such occasions even those who profess most are apt to speak together, as if there were no God, or as if He did not hear them saying, "What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it." They would, if they could. Their will was engaged (sad to say!) against God, against the truth, against Jehovah and His anointed. "But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they may speak henceforth to no man in this name." Thus their lack of conscience could not be hid: witness their opposition to facts that they knew, and to truth that they could not deny. The apostles cannot but take the real seat of judgment, searching the hearts of their judges: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. And being let go, they went to their own [company]." It is seen in this passage how truly it has been said that we have a new family. They went to their own [company], and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them." Accord-



ingly we find them speaking to God in a new manner, and suitably to the occasion: "Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together in this city [these last words being wrongly omitted in the received text] against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy servant [again it is *servant*] Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy *servant* Jesus." And God answered. "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." They had received the Holy Ghost before; but to be "filled" with Him goes farther, and supposes that no room was left for the action of nature, that the power of the Holy Ghost absorbed all for the time being. "They were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." Such was the effect. They were to be witnesses of Him.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common." The Spirit

of God repeated this, I suppose, as having a further proof of His action on their souls at this time, because many more had been brought in. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet,"—a slightly different development from the second chapter. There we find that there was what might seem a greater freeness, and perhaps to some eyes a more striking simplicity. But all is in season, and it seems to me that, while the devotedness was the same (and the Spirit of God takes pains to show that it was the same, spite of largely increased numbers, by the continued mighty action of the Holy Ghost), still with this advance of numbers simplicity could not be kept up in the same apparent manner. The distribution made to each before was more direct and immediate; now it takes effect through the apostles. The possessions were laid at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to every one according as he had need. Among the rest one man was conspicuous for the heartiness of his love. It was Barnabas, of whom we are afterwards to hear much in other ways of still more lasting moment.

But there is rarely a manifestation of God in the church without a dark shadow that accompanies it from the evil one. And further we find this immediately. We are not to be alarmed by the presence of evil, but rather to be sure that where God works Satan will

follow, seeking to turn the very good in which the Spirit acts into a means for introducing his own counterfeit to the dishonour of the Lord. Thus in the present instance Ananias and Sapphira sell some of their property, but keep back part of the price; and this was done deliberately by concert for the purpose of gaining the character of devotedness without its cost. In principle they made the church their world, in which they sought to give the impression of a faith that confided in the Lord absolutely, while at the same time there was a secret reserve for themselves. Now the manifest point of that which was then wrought by the Spirit of God was grace in faith: there was in no way a demand. Nothing could more falsify the fruit of the Spirit of God here than converting it into a tacit rule: there was no compulsion whatever in the case. Nobody was asked to give anything. What was gold or silver, what houses or lands, to the Lord? The worth of it all depended on its being the power of the Spirit of God—the fruit of divine grace in the heart. But Satan tempted them in the manner here described; and Peter, by whatever means he arrived at the conviction of it, arraigns the husband alone first. “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?”

It is a solemn thing to remember, that all sin now is against the Spirit. There may be, no doubt, the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against Him; but in truth all sin is sin against the Holy Ghost; and for this simple reason, that He has taken His place here. In Israel the sin was against the law, because the law was the testimony that God set in His sanctuary. By the law sin was measured in Israel; but it is not so for the

Christian. There is now a far more serious and searching and thorough standard. Those that use the law now as a measure among Christians lower the test of judgment incomparably. Such a misuse of the law for righteous men does not at all prove that they are anxious about holiness or righteousness; it is a proof of their ignorance of the presence of the Holy Ghost, and the just and necessary effects of His presence. One has no thought, I repeat, of implying that it is not well meant. To be sure it is. It is simply that they do not understand the distinctive character of Christianity.

But this is a most serious error; and I doubt much whether all who in appearance and by profession take the place of owning the presence of the Spirit of God have by any means an adequate sense either of the privileges which are theirs or of the gravity of their responsibility. Now, Peter had. The days were early. There was much truth that had yet to be communicated and learnt; but the power of the presence of the Holy Ghost made itself felt. He at least seems to have realised the bearing of all, and so he deals with the sin of Ananias as one who had lied to the Holy Ghost. He had kept back part of the price of the land. "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" It was still his own. "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

Forthwith Ananias comes under the judgment of the Lord. He fell asleep, and great fear came upon all them that heard these words. "And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after,

when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter said to her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" Thus there was an appeal to her conscience, without an atom of harshness in it. She had longer time to weigh what they were about; but in truth it was a conspiracy; not so much to injure others as to exalt themselves; but the end was as bad as the means were evil and odious in the sight of God. Christ entered into none of their thoughts or desires. Many a thing has been said untruly since, which was not so judged of God. But there was an especial offence at this time, in that, He having wrought so wondrously in blessing man with the best blessings through Christ our Lord, the practical denial of the presence of the Spirit should have so deliberately and quickly manifested itself for the express purpose of exalting the flesh which Christianity has set aside for ever. Hence Peter says, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out. . . . And great fear came upon all the church."

Then we find the Lord accomplishing His word: greater works were to be done by them than even He Himself had wrought: never do we hear of the Lord's shadow curing the sick. And believers were the more added to the Lord. The unbelievers were warned, "and of the rest durst no man join himself unto them." Souls that bowed to the word were attracted, multitudes both of men and women; and the enemy was awed, in some quarters alarmed, and irritated in others. "The high priest rose up, and all they that were with him,



and were filled with indignation. They laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison."

But the angel of the Lord shows his power; for this chapter is remarkable in giving us a picture not merely of the sweet activity of grace, but of divine power in presence of evil. We have seen the positive interference of the Spirit of God. At the end of the chapter before we had the second witness of it, after the foundation laid, and first witness given, in chapter ii. But here we have the proofs of His presence in other ways—power in dealing with the evil, and judging it within the church of God; next, power by angelic deliverance; thirdly, power by men in providence. Gamaliel in council is just as truly the effect of God's power working by man, as the angel in opening the doors of the prison and bringing the apostles out,—not, of course, so wonderful, but as real a part of God's working in behalf of His assembly and servants.

But there is another case. The very same men who were delivered by divine power are allowed to be beaten by man. Nay, not only do they take it quietly—these men about whom all the power of God was thus seen in action in one form or another; but they rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer. Are we prepared for the same thing? Be assured, brethren, if we have any tie with Christ by grace, we belong to the same company: it is our own company; it is a part of our own heritage of blessing. It is not, I admit, according to the spirit of the age to deal with us after the same sort; but there is no real change for the better in the world to hinder the outbreak of its violence at any time. Is it not well therefore for us to realize to what

we belong, and what the Lord looks for from us, and what it is He has recorded for our instruction as well as comfort?

After all this then we find that "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." It is impossible that a human authority could be entitled to set aside the direct command of the Lord Jesus. The Lord had commanded them to go and preach the gospel to every creature. Men had forbidden this. It is very clear that the apostle Peter gives the prohibition only a human place now (ch. v. 29). If men had told them to be silent, and the Lord bid them preach, the highest authority must be paramount.

Another form of evil betrays itself in the next chapter (vi.); and here again we find in the very good that God had wrought evil murmuring is found. It is not merely individuals as before; in some respects it is a more serious case: there are complaints heard in the church—the murmuring of Grecians against the Hebrews (that is, of the foreign speaking Jews against the Jews proper of the Holy Land), because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. This forms the occasion for the provisional wisdom of the Spirit of God.

We have already seen with abundant evidence how truly the church is a divine institution, founded upon a divine person (even the Holy Ghost) coming down and making it, since redemption, His dwelling-place



here below. Besides, we may now learn the working of this living power that is drawn out by the circumstances which call it forth. It is not a system of rules; nothing is more destructive of the very nature of the church of God. It is not a human society, with either the leaders of it or the mass choosing for themselves what or whom they think best, but the Spirit of God who is there meets in His wisdom whatever may be necessary for the glory of Christ. All this is preserved in the written word for our instruction and guidance now.

Here we have the institution of seven men to look after the poor who were in danger of being forgotten, or in some way neglected—at any rate, so they had complained. To cut off the appearance of it, and at the same time to leave the apostles free for their own proper work of a more spiritual kind, “the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”

Thus we find two things: not only the apostles formally appointing, but the multitude of the believers left to choose, where it was a question that concerned the distribution of their gifts. On the part of those that governed the church of God, there ought not to be the appearance of coveting the property of God's people, or the disposal of it. At the same time the apostles do appoint those who were thus chosen over this matter. They were called of God to act, and so

they do. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word."

The principle of the choice too is striking; for all these names, it would appear, were Grecian. What gracious wisdom! This was clearly to stop the mouths of the complainants. The Hellenists, or Grecians, were jealous of the Palestinian Jews. The persons appointed were, judging from their names, every one of them Hellenists, or foreign-speaking Jews. The troublers ought to have been not only satisfied but somewhat ashamed. Thus it is that grace, while it discerns, knows how to rise above evil; for murmuring against others is not the way to correct anything that is wrong, even if it be real. But the grace of the Lord always meets circumstances, and turns them to a profitable account, by a manifestation of wisdom from above. The field was about to be enlarged; and although it was but a poor root of man's complaints which led to this fresh line of action, God was moving over all, could use these seven, and would give some of them a good degree, as we find in Stephen soon and in Philip later. But He marked it in another way too, which showed His approbation. "The word of God increased," spite of murmuring; "and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly;" and a new feature appears—"a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

Stephen then, full of grace and power (but One could be said to be full of grace and truth), is found doing great wonders. This draws out the opposition of the leaders of the Jews, who "were not able to resist the spirit and the wisdom with which he spake. Then they suborned

men, who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law : for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."

Accordingly, thus accused, Stephen answers the appeal of the high priest, "Are these things so?" And in his wonderful discourse (chap. vii.), on which I can but touch, he sets before them the prominent facts of their history, which bear on God's question with the Jews at this moment. God had brought out their forefather Abraham, but He never gave *him* actually to possess this land. Why, then, boast of *it* so much? Those who, according to nature, vaunted loudly of Abraham and of God's dealings, were clearly not in communion with God, or even with Abraham. Spite of the love and honour that God had for their forefathers, he never possessed the land. Why, then, set such stress on that land?

But more than this. There was one of the descendants of the fathers who stands out most especially, and above all of the family of Abraham, in the book of Genesis—one man who, more than any other, was the type of the Messiah. Need I say it was Joseph? And how did he fare? Sold by his brethren to the Gentiles. The application was not difficult. They knew how they had treated Jesus of Nazareth. Their

consciences could not fail to remind them how the Gentiles would have willingly let Him go, and how their voices and will had prevailed against even that hardened governor of Judæa, Pontius Pilate. Thus it was manifest that the leading points of Joseph's tale, as far as the wickedness of the Jews, and the selling to the Gentiles, were rehearsed again in Jesus of Nazareth.

But, coming down later still, another man fills the history of the second book of the Bible, and indeed has to do with all the remaining books of the Pentateuch. It was Moses. What about him? Substantially the same story again: the rejected of Israel, whose pride would not hear when he sought to bring about peace between a contending Israelite and his oppressor, Moses was compelled to fly from Israel, and then found his hiding-place among the Gentiles. How far Stephen entered intelligently into the bearing of these types it is not for one to say; but we can easily see the wisdom of God; we can see the power of the Holy Ghost with which he spake.

But there was another element also. He comes down next to their temple; for this was an important point. It was not only that he had spoken of Jesus of Nazareth, but they had also charged him with saying that He would destroy this place, and change their customs. What did their own prophets say? "But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in [places] made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?" In short, he shows that

Israel had sinned against God in every ground of relationship. They had broken the law; they had slain the prophets; they had killed the Messiah; and they had always resisted the Holy Ghost. What an awful position! and the more awful, because it was the simple truth.

This brought out the frenzied rage of Israel, and they gnashed on him with their teeth; and he that charged them with always resisting the Holy Ghost, as their fathers did, full of the Holy Ghost looks up into heaven, and sees the Son of man, and bears witness that he sees Him standing at the right hand of God. And thus we have what I began with: we have the manifestation of the character of Christianity, and the perception of its power, and the effect produced upon him that appreciated it. We have not merely the Lord going up to heaven, but His servant, who saw heaven open, and Jesus, the Son of man, standing at the right hand of God.

But there is more: for while they rushed now to silence the mouth which so completely proved their nation's habitual sin against the Spirit, they stoned him indeed, but they stoned him praying, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." They could not silence the words that told how deeply he had drunk into the grace of the Lord Jesus. They could not silence his confidence, his peaceful entrance into his place with Christ, associated consciously with Him as he was. And then we learn (it may be without a thought on his part) how grace conforms to the words of Jesus on the cross, and certainly without the smallest imitation of it, but so much the more evincing the power of God. For Jesus

could say, and He alone could say rightly, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Jesus alone fittingly could say, "I *commend* my spirit." He who could lay down His life, and could take it again, could so speak to the Father. But the servant of the Lord could say, and rightly and blessedly, "Lord Jesus, *receive* my spirit." Nor was this all; the same heart that thus confided absolutely in the Lord, and knew his own heavenly portion with Jesus, kneels down and cries with a loud voice. This was not directed to Jesus only: no loud voice was needed there: a whisper would be enough for Him. The loud voice was for man, for his dull ears and unfeeling heart. With a loud voice he cries, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." What simplicity, but what fulness of communion with Jesus! The same who had prayed for them reproduced His own feelings in the heart of His servant.

I shall not now develop this subject more than other scenes of the deepest interest, but just simply and shortly commend to all that are here the beautiful witness that it affords us of the true place, power, and grace of a Christian.



## II.

### THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

Chaps. viii.-xii.

WE are now arrived at a turning-point in the history, not merely of the church, but of the unfolding of the truth of God, and the manifestation of His ways. The death of Stephen, therefore, has in various points of view a great significance. And no wonder. His was the first spirit that departed to be with Christ after the Holy Ghost was given. But it was not merely one who departed to be with the Lord, which was far better; it was by the act of the Jews in the infuriate spirit of persecution. The very same people had done it who had so lately received with the utmost favour (not the truth, nor the grace of God, which is inseparable from His truth, but), at any rate, the mighty impress of the grace as well as of the truth which had produced unwonted largeness of heart, unselfishness of spirit, and joy and liberty, that struck the minds of the Jews accustomed to the coldness of death in their own system.

But now all was changed. What was most sweet soon became bitter, as it often is in the things of God. And when they understood the bearing of that which God had wrought here below—that it judged



man; that it gave no countenance to the religiousness in which they boasted; that it showed most convincingly, and so much the more bitterly because convincingly, what God all through His testimony with them had expressly intimated, by the prophets as well as in the types of the law itself, that He had deeper purposes; that nothing on earth could satisfy Him; that it was in His mind, on the proved ruin of Israel, to bring in heaven and its things for a heavenly people even while here below:—now that this was made manifest, above all, in the testimony that Stephen had rendered to the very man that they had rejected and crucified, seen in glory at the right hand of God, it was unbearable. Could it be otherwise, when, spite of proud unbelief and conceit of distinctive privilege, they were forced to feel that they were none the less the constant resisters of the Holy Ghost like their fathers, who had been guilty themselves, and suffered the consequence of their guilt in their prostration to the Gentiles; to feel now that they themselves were no better, but rather worse; that there was the same unbelief bringing out its effects even more tremendously; that they were guilty of the blood of their own Messiah, who was now risen and exalted in the highest seat of heaven? All these things were pressed home by Stephen; indeed, I have simply touched on a very small part of his most telling address.

But the close lets us see more than this. There was the revelation now of Christ as an object for the Christian in heaven, and the revelation of Him too in a way entirely outside the narrow boundaries of Judaism. Stephen speaks of Him as Son of man. This is an

essential feature of Christianity. Unlike the law, it addresses all; there is no narrowness in a rejected heavenly Christ. By the Holy Ghost there is imparted all the firmness of a divine bond, and all the intimacy of a real living relationship of the nearest kind. At the same time, along with this is seen universality in the going out of both the truth and grace of God, which could not but be foreign to the law. And although its character had to be yet more brought out by another and far greater witness of divine things who was still in the blindness of Jewish unbelief—at this very moment himself taking his own miserable part, though with a good natural conscience, in the death of Stephen,—all told powerfully upon the Jews, but lacerated their feelings to the utmost.

I have already touched upon the practical effects, and therefore will not enlarge on these now. My object, of course, is simply to give a sketch of the important book now before us, endeavouring to connect (as, indeed, evidently the chapter does connect) what was coming with what was past. Saul was consenting unto Stephen's death, and Saul was the expression of Jewish feeling in its best aspect. It was now guilty of resisting unto blood, not merely as their fathers had done, but the heavenly testimony of Jesus. Nevertheless the God that vindicated the honour of the crucified Jesus did not forget the martyred Stephen; and though there was an outburst of persecution, which scattered abroad throughout the region of Judæa and Samaria all the believers that were in Jerusalem except the apostles, devout men were not wanting who carried Stephen

to his burial. Clearly they were not Christians; but God has all hearts in His keeping. And they "made great lamentation over him." This was suitable to them. Theirs was not the joy that saw into the presence of God. They felt in a measure, and justly, the tremendous deed that had been done. And as there was reality at least in their feeling, they made suitable lamentation. But "as for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and dragging off men and women, committed them to prison." Religious persecution is invariably ruthless and blind even to the commonest feelings of humanity.

"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word;" for the God who not only has hearts at His command, but controls all circumstances, was now about to accomplish that which He had always at heart, making the disciples to be witnesses of Jesus to the very ends of the earth, though first of all to Judæa and Samaria. Accordingly we find, as the testimony had gone forth throughout Jerusalem at least, so now the old rival of Jerusalem comes within the dealings of God. Philip, who had been appointed by the apostles at the choice of the multitude of the disciples to care for the distribution to the poor, goes down to the cities of Samaria preaching Christ. This did not at all flow from his ordination. His appointment was to take care of the tables. His preaching Christ was the fruit of the Lord's call. Where man chooses for human things, we have the Lord recognising it. He would have His people, where they give, to have a voice. He would meet them in grace, stopping complaints, and showing that He honours and

confides in their suitable choice. But not so in the ministry of the word or testimony of the Lord. Here the Lord alone gives, alone calls, alone sends forth. Philip, besides being one of the seven, was an "evangelist," as we are told expressly in another part of this very book (chap. xxi. 8). It is important to distinguish between the two things—one, the charge to which man appointed him; the other, the gift which the Lord conferred. (Ephes. iv.) I merely make the remark in passing; though it will not be needed for most here, it may be for some.

Philip goes down, then, preaching Christ; "and the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." But the testimony of miracles is apt to act upon the flesh. They are, indeed, a sign to unbelievers, and that such is the result we find shown us by the Spirit of God in the chapter before us. However graciously given of the Lord as a token to attract the careless minds of men, they are dangerous when they are made the resting-place and the object of the mind; and this was the fatal mistake made then, and not merely there but by many millions of souls from that day to this. Faith never rests on any other ground than God's word. All else is vain, and apt to accredit as well as entice man. There was indeed the unmistakable action of the Spirit of God on this occasion—the power that cast out unclean spirits and healed the sick, as well as the means of spreading joy throughout that city for the souls of men. Evidently it was power in external display, then so richly manifested, which acted on the fleshly mind of Simon, himself

having the reputation of a great one, and before this the vessel of some kind of demoniacal power—the miserable power of Satan, with which he dazzled the eyes of men. But now finding himself eclipsed, like a wily man, his object was to avail himself of this superior energy if it were possible. His aim was not Christ; it was all for himself. He wished to gain fresh influence, not to lose his old: why not, by this new method, if possible, turn things to his own account?

Accordingly, among the train of those that received the gospel and were baptized, Simon is found. Philip had not the discernment to see through him: evangelists are apt to be sanguine. It may be that the Lord had not allowed the true character of Simon to be manifested to every eye at that moment. It did not escape the discerning eyes of Peter a little afterward. But as we are told here, “When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women; and Simon himself believed also.” Scripture does show, though it does not sanction as divine, a faith that is founded on evidence. And it continues still. So John often speaks of it; and the very one that tells us most of the divinely given character of true faith—who most of all lets us into its secret power and blessedness, even eternal life as bound up with it,—that same John is the one who more than any other furnishes instances of a mere humanly produced faith. Such was the faith of Simon. The gospel of Luke also describes what is similar; that is to say, a faith not insincere but human, not wrought of the Spirit but founded on the mind yielding to reasons, proofs, evidences, which are to

it overpowering; but there is nothing of God in it: there is no meeting between the soul and God. Without this, faith is good for nothing, nor is God Himself honoured in His own word. Power was what struck Simon's mind—himself a devotee of power, who in times past had sunk indeed low, even to the enemy of God and man in order from any source to be the vessel of a power beyond man. He could not deny the might that proved itself without effort superior to anything he had ever wielded. This was what attracted him; and, as it is said here, "he continued with Philip" (there was no other bond of connexion), "and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." A believer would have wondered more at the grace of God, and bowed in adoration before Him. Conscience would have been searched by the truth of God; and the heart would have been filled with praise at the grace of God. Neither one nor other ever entered into the thoughts or feelings of Simon.

And "when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John." It was of the greatest importance that unity should be kept up practically,—not merely that there should be proclaimed the truth that there is unity, but that there should be the maintenance of it in practice. Accordingly Peter and John, two of the chiefs among the apostles, come down from Jerusalem. But there was another reason too. It was so ordered of God that the Holy Ghost should not at first be conferred on the disciples at Samaria: I do not mean merely on such as Simon or false brethren, but even on those that were true. Undoubtedly they could not



have believed the gospel, had there not been the quickening operation of the Holy Ghost; but we must distinguish between the Holy Ghost giving life and the Holy Ghost Himself given.

Another thing too let me again and again remark: the gift of the Holy Ghost never means those mighty wonders of power which had acted on the greedy and ambitious mind of Simon Magus. The gift of the Spirit is not at all the same thing as the gifts. These gifts, at least such as were of an extraordinary sort, were the outward signs of that gift in early days; and it was of great importance that there should be a decisive palpable testimony to it. The presence of the Holy Ghost was a new and quite unexampled thing even among believers. Hence it is there were mighty powers that wrought by those who were employed by the Holy Ghost; as, for instance, by Philip himself; afterwards also by the disciples, when Peter and John came down and laid their hands upon them with prayer. The Holy Ghost came upon them, not merely, it will be observed, certain spiritual powers, but the Holy Ghost Himself. They had not those powers only, but this divine person given to them. Scripture is clear and unequivocal as to the truth of the case. I can understand difficulties in the minds of believers; and no one would wish to force or hurry the convictions of any; nor would it be of the slightest value to receive even a truth without the faith that is produced, and exercised, and cleared by the word of God. But at the same time to my own mind it seems to be only homage to God's word to affirm positively that of which I am sure.

I therefore must say that the gift of the Holy Ghost



here is, in my judgment, clearly distinct from anything in the way of either a spiritual gift for souls or a miraculous power, as it is called. There followed also such signs, or outward powers; but the Holy Ghost was given Himself, according to the Lord's word—the promise of the Father, a promise which, as all know, was in the first instance assured to those who were already believers, and which was made good to them because they were believers, not to make them so. When redemption was accomplished, it was the seal of the faith and the life which they already had. There can be no doubt that the facts at Samaria were analogous; but this remarkable feature is to be noticed, that the Holy Ghost was here conferred by (not, as at Jerusalem, apart from) the laying on of the hands of the apostles. Of this we heard nothing in the divine history of the day of Pentecost; and I think that scripture is abundantly plain that there could have been nothing of the kind then and there. First of all, the apostles and the disciples themselves received it as they were waiting. The Holy Ghost came down upon them suddenly, with no previous sign whatever, except that which was suitable to the Holy Ghost when sent down from heaven—the mighty rushing wind, and then the tokens of His presence upon each were manifested. Yet there was no such requirement as imposition of hands in order to be the medium of it. But it would seem that special reasons operated at Samaria to make it necessary there. It was of all moment to keep up the links practically between a work which might have looked to many there, as now, not a little irregular. It was wrought not by those that had previously been always the great

spiritual witnesses; for we hear of none ministering but the apostles, and indeed not even of all the apostles speaking, though it may be that they did. But here we have clearly a man who had been chosen for another and an external purpose by the church, but whom the Lord uses elsewhere for a new and higher purpose, for which He had qualified him by the Holy Ghost.

Nevertheless, care was taken to hinder all appearance of independence or indifference to unity. There was the freest action of the Holy Ghost,—sovereignly free,—and it is impossible to maintain this too stringently; and there was the utmost care that all should be left open for the Holy Ghost to act according to His own will, not only within the church, but also by evangelizing outside. For all that God took precaution to bind up together the work at Samaria with that which He had wrought at Jerusalem. Hence, though Philip might preach and they receive the gospel, the apostles come down, and with prayer lay their hands upon them, and then they receive the Holy Ghost. To a reflecting believer it will be plain that the reasons for this do not hold at the present time. I merely make this remark lest any should draw from this the inference that there is a necessity for men commissioned from God to lay on hands now in order to confer such a spiritual blessing.

The fact is, that the notion of imposition of hands being a universal medium of conveying the Holy Ghost is certainly a mistake. On the greatest occasions, when the Holy Ghost was given, we have no ground to believe that hands were laid on any. There were two exceptional occasions on which one or more of the apostles so acted, but at times of more

general interest and importance nothing of the sort was heard of. Take, as the most solemn moment of all, the day of Pentecost. Who that honours scripture can pretend that hands were laid on any then? Yet the Holy Ghost was given in especial power on that day. But what is more to the purpose for us Gentiles, when Cornelius and his household were brought in, not only no appearance of it is visible, but positive proof to the contrary. Peter was present, but he certainly laid no hand of his on a single soul that day before the Holy Ghost was given. So far from it, as we shall find by and by in chapter x., the Holy Ghost was given while he was yet speaking, before they were so much as baptized. On the day of Pentecost they were baptized first, and then they received the gift of the Holy Ghost. At Samaria they had been baptized for some time, as we know. On believing they were baptized, as we are told in Acts viii.; but they received the Holy Ghost after an interval, through the action of the apostles.

I refer to this just to show how far scripture is from countenancing the cramped ideas of men, and that the only way of truth is to believe all the word of God, searching out the special principle of God by which He instructs us in the different characters of His action. Surely He is always wise and consistent with Himself. It is we who by confounding matters lose consequently the blessedness and beauty of the truth of God.

Now the reason, as it appears to me, why divine wisdom led to this striking difference at Samaria, was the necessity of hindering that independence to which even Christians are so liable. There was special exposure to this evil which called for so much the greater

guard against it at Samaria. How painful must it be to the Spirit of God if the old pride of Samaria were to rise up against Jerusalem ! God would cut off the very appearance of this. There was the free action of His Spirit towards Samaria without the apostles, but the Holy Ghost was given by the laying on of their hands. This solemn act was not merely an ancient sign of divine blessing, but of identification also. Such, I suppose, therefore, was the principle that lay at the bottom of the difference of the divine action on these two occasions.

Then we find Simon struck not so much by an individual's endowment with miraculous power, as by the fact that others received it by the apostles' laying on of hands. At once, with the instinct of flesh, he sees a good opportunity for himself, and, judging of others' hearts by his own, presents money as the means of acquiring the coveted power. But this detects the man. How often our words show where we are ! How continually too where we least think they do ! It is not only in cases of our judgment (for there is nothing that so often judges a man as his own judgment of another) ; but also where the desire goes out after that which we have not got. How all-important for our souls that we should have Christ before us, and that we should have no desire but for His glory ! Not a ray of the light of Christ had entered the heart of Simon, and so Peter at once detects the false heart. With that energy which characterized him he says, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter : for thy heart is not

right in the sight of God." At the same time there is the pity that belongs to one who knew the grace of God, and saw the end of all in His judgment. "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God if, perhaps, the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. Simon can only answer, "Pray ye to the Lord for me." He had no confidence in the Lord for himself—not a particle; for just as those who have confidence in the Lord have not an atom in man, his sole hope of blessing for his soul lay in the influence of another man, not in Christ's grace. "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of those things which ye have spoken come upon me."

The apostles then, after preaching in the various villages of the Samaritans, return to Jerusalem. But not so the word of God. The gospel goes forth elsewhere; it is in no way bound to Jerusalem. On the contrary, the grand bearing of this chapter is that now the tide of blessing is flowing away from Jerusalem. The holy city had rejected the gospel. It was not enough that they had rejected the Messiah, nor even that He was made Lord and Christ on high. They refused utterly the Holy Ghost's testimony to the Son of man glorified in heaven, and slew or scattered the witnesses. Who then was specially used as the instrument of the free action of the Holy Ghost elsewhere, without plan, without thought of man, and apparently the simple result of circumstances, but in truth God's hand directing all? Philip is told by the angel of the Lord to arise and go towards the south—towards "Gaza, which is desert."



“And he arose and went.” Strikingly beautiful it is to see the devoted simplicity with which he answers to the call of his Master. I will not pretend to say that it cost him little, but am sure it would have been a heavy trial to many a man of God to leave that which was so bright, where He had wrought powerfully in using himself for His own glory. But he is truly a bondman, and at once is ready to go at the bidding of the Lord, who had given him to reap in joy where He had Himself tasted the firstfruits in the days of His own ministry here below. Samaria, which had held out against the truth, was now yielding the harvest that a greater than Philip had sown; and there was joy in that very Samaria where greater works were now done according to His own word.

But this was not enough for God. A man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the queen of the Ethiopians, was returning after having gone up to Jerusalem to worship. He was going back without the blessing that his earnest heart yearned after. He had gone up to the great city of solemnities, but the blessing was no longer to be found there. Jehovah’s house had been left doubly desolate; Jerusalem had this added to her other sins that, when the blessing had come down from heaven, she would not have it. She despised the Holy Ghost as she had despised the Messiah; and no wonder therefore that he who had gone up to Jerusalem to worship was returning with the yearnings of his heart still unsatisfied. And not the angel but the Spirit guides now. The angel had to do with providential circumstances, but the Spirit with that which directly deals with spiritual need and bless-



ing. So says the Spirit to Philip, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot." Philip acts at once, with alacrity hears the eunuch read the prophet Isaiah, and puts the question whether he understood what was read. The answer is, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Thereon Philip is invited to come up and sit with him, Isaiah liii. being, as we know, the portion in question; and the eunuch asks of whom the prophet spoke these words—"of himself or some other man?" so gross was his darkness even as to the general point of the chapter. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the very same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." It was enough. That one name, through faith in it, what could it not accomplish? The facts were notorious; but of this we may be sure, that never had they been put together before the mind of the Ethiopian as then, never connected with the living Word and His grace. They were now put in contact with his wants, and all was instantly light in his soul. Oh, what a blessing it is to have and know such a Saviour! What a joy to be warranted to proclaim Him to others without stint, even to a soul as dark as the Ethiopian, who was then and there baptized!

Remember that verse 37 is only an imaginary conversation between him and Philip. The man just now so ignorant is not the channel that God was about to use for bringing out the remarkable confession that is introduced prematurely here. It was reserved for another of whom we shall read in the next chapter. This scene does show the stranger discovering the predicted Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth—the Messiah suffering, no doubt, but accomplishing atonement. Certainly the

Ethiopian received the truth; but verse 37 had better be passed by in your minds, at least in this connexion. All who are informed in these matters are aware that the best authorities reject the entire verse.

“He went on his way rejoicing.” Though the Spirit of the Lord catches away Philip, so full is his heart of the truth that we may be sure all that occurred confirmed it in his eyes. How could anything seem too great and good to him whose heart had just made the acquaintance of Jesus? Did he not feel so much the more settled in Jesus as there was no other object now before his soul? It was the Lord that had brought Philip, and it was His Spirit that had taken him away; but it was He too who had given him and left him Jesus for ever. Philip is found at Azotus, and passing through he preaches elsewhere.

At this point we come to the history of the call of another and yet more honoured witness of divine grace and Christ’s glory. Saul of Tarsus was yet breathing out his threats and slaughter when the Lord was pursuing His onward gracious work among the Samaritans and strangers. The returning treasurer of Queen Candace was a proselyte, I suppose, from the Gentiles, living among them, not as a Gentile himself, but practically a Jew, whatever the place of his birth and residence. The time for the call of the Gentiles strictly was not yet come, though the way is being prepared. The Samaritans, as you know, were a mongrel race; the stranger may have been possibly a proselyte from among the Gentiles; but the apostle of the Gentiles *is now* to be called. Such is the unfolding of the ways of God at this point.

Saul in his zeal had desired letters giving him authority to punish the Christian Jews, and was found on his way journeying near the Gentile city that he sought. "Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord?" All depended upon this. "And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." What a revolution this word caused in that mighty heart! Confidence in man, in self, was overthrown to its foundations—all that his life had been zealously building up. "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." It was the Lord undoubtedly, and the Lord declared He was Jesus, and Jesus was Jehovah. He dared not doubt longer: to him it was self-evident. If Jesus was Jehovah, what then had his religion been? what had high priest or Sanhedrim done for him? Was it not then God's high priest, God's law? Unquestionably it was. How then could so fatal an error have been committed? It was the fact. Man, Israel, not merely Saul, was altogether blinded: the flesh never knows God. The despised and hated name of Jesus is the only hope for man, Jesus is the only Saviour and Lord. His glory burst on the astonished eyes of Saul, who surrenders immediately. It was not without the deepest searching of heart, though smitten down at once; for how could there be a question as to the divine power? How could its reality be doubted? As little could there be a question as to the grace exercised toward him, though the manner was not after that of man. The light that shone suddenly on him was from heaven. But it was God's way. The voice

that said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" was from Jesus. "Who art thou, Lord?" he cried, and hears, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." How could he resist the heavenly vision?

Observe that, although the next words are beyond a question scriptural, and so far the case differs from verse 37 referred to in the last chapter, the last clause of verse 5 and the first of verse 6 belong properly speaking to two other chapters (xxii. xxvi.) rather than to this. I do not therefore comment upon these additions here: they will remain for their own real and suitable places. But Saul does arise from the earth. "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." But *he* had heard the voice of His mouth, and His words were spirit and life, eternal life, to his soul. Three days and nights he neither eats nor drinks. The profound moral work of God proceeded in that converted heart. Nevertheless even he, apostle though he were, must enter by the same lowly gate as another. And so we have the story of Ananias, and the ways of the Lord,—not of some great apostle, nor even of Philip, but a disciple at Damascus named Ananias, to whom the Lord spoke in a vision. And he goes, the Lord communicating another vision to the apostle himself, in which he sees Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight.

The Spirit puts us in presence of the freedom of the servant, as he pleads with the Lord, for neither man nor even the child of God ever reaches up to the height of His grace. Ananias, wholly unprepared for the call of such an enemy of the gospel, slow of

heart to believe all, expostulates, as it were, with the Saviour. "Lord," says he, "I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name." But the Lord said unto him, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

Even here the intimation is sufficiently plain that the Gentiles were in the foreground of the work designed for Saul of Tarsus. But this was not all. It was to be emphatically a witness of grace in suffering for Christ's name: "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." And so it was. Ananias goes, puts his hand on him, addresses him by the sweet title of relationship Christ began, consecrated, and has given, telling him how the Lord, even Jesus, had appeared unto him. How confirmatory it must have been to the apostle's heart to learn that Ananias was now sent by the same Lord Jesus, without the slightest intimation from without, whether of Saul himself or any other man! "The Lord hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." And every word was made good. "Saul arose and was baptized, and when he had received meat he was strengthened, and remained with the disciples for some time."

In due time follows the further development of the truth as to Christ in testimony. "He preached in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." Such was the emphatic and characteristic presentation of His person assigned to the apostle, and this at once. It was

not that Peter did not know the same, we are all aware how blessedly he confessed Him to be (not Messiah only, but) the Son of the living God while Jesus was here below. Nor is it that the other disciples had not the same faith. Surely it was true of all who really believed and knew His glory. Nevertheless "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;" and he who loves to present the Lord in the depth of His personal grace, and the height of His glory, has surely a spiritual fitness for the expression of the heart's joy in that which faith has created within. Thus, although the others no doubt had the same Saviour taught them by the Holy Ghost, still there was not in every case the same measure of entrance or appreciation. Paul had it not more suddenly than with a heavenly splendour which was peculiar to himself; and thus there was a vast work soon wrought. There was a bringing out of that which belonged to Christ, not merely the place which Christ took, but that which He *is* from all eternity,—consequently that which is most of all intrinsically precious. He preached Him, and this boldly in the synagogue too, "that he is the Son of God." All that heard were amazed. "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." The doctrine of His Sonship did not in the smallest degree, of course, set aside the Messiahship. This remained; but he preached Him rather in His own personal glory,—not as the Son of David, the servant, which was the great burden of Peter's preaching, *made* Lord and Christ;—not that He was the Son of man in heaven, as Stephen witnessed; but that this Jesus, the Christ, is



the Son of God;—clearly therefore more particularly bound up with the divine nature, or godhead glory of Himself.

After this comes no slight discipline for Saul. As the Jews watched the gates to kill him, the disciples took him by night and let him down the wall in a basket. Thus we find the utmost simplicity and quietness. There is no show of doing great things; nor do we read of daring in any way: what is there of Christ in the one or the other? Contrariwise, we see that which outwardly looks exceedingly weak; but this was the man that was in another day to say that he gloried in his infirmities. He acts on that of which he afterwards wrote. He was led of God.

Then we learn another important lesson. “When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.” God did not clothe him with such overwhelming influence that doors were thrown open to him though the greatest of the apostles. Oh why should any confessor of Christ—why should any child of God—shrink from rendering godly satisfaction to those that seek it? Why so much haste and impatience? Why should there be unwillingness to meet and submit to others when it is a question of reception? What earnest desire should there not be to bow to all that which is due to the church of God? Here we find not even the apostle Paul was above it.

Not on the other hand that there ought to be a spirit of suspicion or distrust in the church or any Christian. I am far from saying that it was comely on their part to indulge in hesitation touching this wondrous display

of divine grace. But what I want to press for our profit, beloved brethren, is that at any rate he who is the object of grace can afford to be gracious. Nor is there a more painful want of it than that kind of restiveness which is so ready to take offence at the smallest fear or anxiety on the part of others. Surely to shrink from their enquiries is nothing but self on our part. If Christ were the object of our souls, we should bow as one did called of God with incomparably better tokens of the Lord's favour than any other,—this blessed man, Saul of Tarsus. But if the church were distrustful, the Lord was not unmindful, and knew how to give courage to the heart of His servant. There was among them a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, of whom we have had a happy report before, as we shall hear many (though not altogether unmingled) good tidings to the end. For indeed he was but man. Nevertheless, being a good man and full of the Holy Ghost, he seeks out and takes Saul to the apostles when others stood aloof, and declared unto them “how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus; and he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.” Grace can credit grace easily, understands the ways of the Lord, and disarms suspicion. It is beautiful to see how the Lord thus, even in the history of that which was unprecedented and might seem to lie outside Christian wants, provides in His blessed word for the every day difficulties we have to prove in such a day of weakness as ours.

After this wonderful working of God the church had rest. I say, “the *church*,” for there need be no doubt,

I think, that such is the true form\* of what is given us

\* The external authority is very decidedly for the singular against the plural. Thus all the first-rate Uncials, the Sinai, Vatican, Alexandrian, and Palimpsest of Paris, supported by some of the best cursives and all the best ancient versions, oppose the vulgar reading.

The following extract from the late Dr. Carson's Letters in reply to Dr. John Brown's Vindication of Presbyterianism will show how far an able and excellent man went astray in defending Congregationalism through not knowing that his argument was based, not on God's word, but on man's corruption of it. I quote from the original edition (Edinburgh, 1807): "Acts xi. 31. 'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria,' &c. Here I would be glad to know how this can be interpreted upon any other principle than that *church* in the single number was solely appropriated to a single congregation, when applied to an assembly of Christ's disciples. It is not the church of Judea, the church of Galilee, and the church of Samaria, but the churches of Judea, &c. Nay, more, had these been Presbyterians, all under the same government, the phraseology would not have been even the church of Judea, and the church of Galilee, and the church of Samaria, but all these would have been in one church, and even then but a small part of a church. This phraseology would have been somewhat like this, 'The church had rest throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria,'—*i.e.*, the part of the church that lies in these countries." (p. 378.) How startled this good man but excessively keen controversialist must have been, had he learnt that, beyond all just question, the only tenable text here is destructive of the notion of independent churches, and in reality gives the appellation to the entire body of the disciples throughout these regions, as standing on one common ground, and enjoying full intercommunion, though in these different districts. But that branch of criticism which consists in a full knowledge of the sources, a nice discrimination of the various readings, and a sound judgment in deciding the preferable text, as it is rarely found, so it certainly was not the forte of Dr. C. One hundred and fifty years ago, Dr. E. Wells, in his "Help for the more easy and clear understanding of the Scriptures" (Oxford, 1718), not only adopted the singular in his Greek text and his English paraphrase, but pointed out in his Annotations the great weakness of the argument drawn by dissenters from the plural *ἐκκλησίαι*, as if it favoured their system of separate churches.

in verse 31. The common text and translations have "the *churches*;" but I believe that this faulty form crept in here, because the sense of the oneness of the church so speedily passed away. Hence people could not understand that it was one and the same church throughout all Judæa, and Galilee, and Samaria. It was plain enough to see the Christian assembly in a city, even if it were as numerous as in Jerusalem, where it must have met in not a few different localities and chambers. The church, not merely in a city but in a province or country, is intelligible enough to man; but it soon became more difficult to see its unity in various and differing provinces. The change of reading here seems to prove it was too much for the copyists of this book. The reading sanctioned by the best and most ancient authorities is the singular—not the churches, but "the church." "Then had the church rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria." Undoubtedly throughout these districts *churches* existed; but it was all one and the same *church* too, and not different bodies.

The end of the chapter shows us the progress of Peter. He visits round about. It was no longer a question of Jerusalem only even for Peter, but without being called to the same largeness of work practically as the apostle Paul, he nevertheless passes throughout "all quarters" of Palestine, and comes down to the saints at Lydda, and is seen by those of Saron. At Joppa too was wrought a still more striking miracle of the Lord in Tabitha's case, already dead, than in that of Eneas, who had been paralysed for years. On these I need only remark how grace used them for

the spread of the testimony. "All that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord." "It was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord." But at this point a still more important step was about to be taken; and the Lord enters on it with due solemnity, as we shall see in the following chap. (x.)

Little did the great apostle of the circumcision anticipate what was before him as he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. For hence the Lord called him to a new sphere—a task which, to a Jewish mind, was beyond measure strange. It would be a mistake to suppose that God had not wrought on the heart of Gentiles. We see such in the gospels. Cornelius was one of those who, among the Gentiles, had abandoned idolatry; but more than this was sometimes found. There were Gentiles who truly looked to the Lord, and not to self or man; who had been taught of Him to look for a coming Saviour, though they quite rightly connected that Saviour with Israel; for such was the burden of the promise. As there was a Job in the Old Testament, independent of the law and perhaps before it, so we find a Cornelius before the glad tidings in the New Testament had been formally sent to the nations. All know that there were Jews waiting for the Saviour. It is of interest to see, and should be better known, that among the Gentiles were not wanting such as worshipped no idols but served the true and living God. No doubt their spiritual condition was defective, and their outward position must have seemed anomalous; but Scripture is decisive that such godly Gentiles there were.

It is a fallacy then to suppose that Cornelius had no better than merely natural religion. He was assuredly, before Peter went, a converted man. To regard him as unawakened at that time is to mistake a great deal of the teaching of the chapter. Not that one would deny that a mighty work was then wrought in Cornelius. We must not limit, as ignorant people do, the operation of the Holy Spirit to the new birth. No man in his natural state could pray, nor serve God acceptably, as Cornelius did. One must be born again; but, like many others who had really been quickened in those days (and it may be even now, I presume), a soul might be born again, and yet far from resting in peace on redemption, far indeed from a sense of deliverance from all questions as to his soul. There is this difference, no doubt, between such cases now and that of Cornelius then,—that, before the mission of Peter, it would have been presumptuous for a Gentile to have pretended to salvation; now it is the fruit of unbelief for a believer to question it. A soul that now looks to Jesus ought to rest without question on redemption; but we must remember that at this time Jesus was not yet publicly preached to the Gentiles—not yet freely and fully proclaimed according to the riches of grace. Therefore, the more godly Cornelius was, the less would he dare to put forth his hand for the blessing before the Lord told him to stretch it out. He did what, I have no doubt, was the right thing. He was truly in earnest before God. As we are told here—and the Spirit delights to give such an account—“he was a devout man, and one that feared God with all his



house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."

Such was the man to whom God was about to send the gospel by Peter. Thus we must carefully remember that the gospel brings more than conversion to God. It is the message of life, but it is also the means of peace. Before the gospel was preached to every creature, a new nature was communicated to many a soul; but till then there was not and could not be peace. The two things are both brought us in the gospel—life brought to light, and the peace preached that was made by the blood of the cross. At the same time scripture shows there might be and often was an interval after the gospel did go forth. So from experience we know there is many a man that you cannot doubt to be truly looking to the Lord, yet far from resting in the peace of God. Cornelius, I apprehend, was just in this case. He would no more have perished, had it pleased God to have taken him away in this state, than any Old Testament saint, whether Jew or Gentile. No believer could be so ignorant of God and His ways of old as to imagine there ought to be any doubt about those who nevertheless were full of anxieties and troubles, and through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Even now, although it is the gospel that God sends out, we know well how many, through a misuse of Old Testament teaching, plunge themselves into distress and doubt. God does not suggest a doubt of His own grace to them, or of the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice for them: unbelief does. It was not so with Cornelius. He was not entitled to take the peace of the gospel till God warranted Peter to bring it to him.

This was precisely what God was now doing; and the remarkable fact appears, that God did not wait for the apostle of the Gentiles to bring the good news to Cornelius. Is not this interlacing after a divine sort? It was not to be done by mere systematic rule of a human pattern. But just as the great apostle of the Gentiles was the one that wrote the final word of testimony to the Christian Jews in the epistle to the Hebrews, so the great apostle of the Jews was the one sent to fling open the door to the Gentile. It was Peter, not Paul, who was sent to Cornelius. The chapter itself proves that he had to be forced to go. He seems to have lost sight of the words of the Lord Jesus—that he was told by Jesus risen from the dead to preach the gospel to every creature. There was to be a testimony to all the nations. The promise was not merely to them and to their children, but to all “afar off, as many as the Lord their God should call.” At any rate, the Lord now graciously interferes, and as he gives Cornelius to see a vision most instructive to him, so next day also there is to Peter another vision from the Lord.

Answering to the vision, messengers bring the apostle to the household of Cornelius, and Peter opens his mouth to the following effect:—“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all :) that word, I say, ye know.” I call your attention to this. Cornelius was not in ignorance of the gospel going out to the children of Israel, but it was precisely *because* he was a lowly-minded believer

that he did not therefore arrogate the blessing to himself. The very essence of faith is, that you do not run before God, but receive what and as He sends to you. God had published it already to the sons of Israel, and the good man rejoiced in it. But for himself and his household, what could he do but pray till the rich blessing came? He valued the ancient people of God; nor is he indeed the only centurion that loved their nation. We are told of another who also built for the Jews their synagogue. Thus Cornelius was aware that God had sent the gospel to the Jews; but there was precisely where he necessarily stopped short. Was that word for him?

“That word ye know,” says Peter, “which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him . . . whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly” (not to all the people, but) “unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people.” Clearly the Jew is meant. “He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name *whosoever*,” &c.

Here comes the telling word for him that feared the Lord and bowed to His word, though he was a Gentile. “Whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission

of sins." Peter had not long learnt it himself. Had he not read or heard those words in the prophets? No doubt he had read them many a time, but no better than we have read them, and many other words likewise; and how little we understood any of them to profit until the mighty power of God gave it efficacy in our souls! In this case Peter had God's own direct warrant in the vision, not of the church (for this was not the meaning of the sheet let down from heaven), but decidedly of the call of the Gentiles. It was the obliterating of mere fleshly distinction between Jew and Gentile. God was meeting sinners as such, whatever they might be, giving no doubt a heavenly character to what had a heavenly source with a heavenly result. But there is not yet the revealed truth of the body, though involved in the word of the Lord to Saul of Tarsus when he said, "Why persecutest thou me?" Here it is not this, but simply the indiscriminate grace of God to sinners of the Gentiles as certainly as to the Jews—to those who, in the judgment of the Jews, were nothing but refuse, vile, and unclean.

Peter then, with this new-born conviction in his soul, reads the prophets with entirely fresh light and other eyes. Full of the truth himself, he speaks with the utmost simplicity to Cornelius, who with his household hears the blessed word. "To him give all the prophets witness." It was one concurrent evidence. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name *whosoever* believeth in him." There is no question of a Jew, but "Whosoever believeth in him." Alas! the Jews did not believe in Him; but whosoever did, let him be Jew or Gentile, "shall receive remission of sins." This

precisely Cornelius had not known, nor could any one have known it till the work of redemption was done. The Old Testament saints were just as safe before the work of Christ as they were afterwards, but this work put them on a ground of conscious salvation before God. It was not a question of being saved in the day of judgment; nor is this the meaning of the term "salvation" in the New Testament. Salvation means that the heart enters into deliverance by grace as a present known public standing in the world. Nobody could have this till the gospel, and even after its publication God Himself sent specifically to the Gentiles; for He has His ways, as well as His times and seasons. God will always be Himself, and cannot be other than Sovereign.

Thus we see God had allowed things apparently to take their course. Israel had the truth presented to them as it was afterwards to all. It was their responsibility now as ever to accept the gracious offer of God. If Israel would have received, the Lord would have given. It was even, and urgently, pressed on them, but they refused with disdain the message, and rejected the messengers to blood. Accordingly the rejection of the very witness of Christ, speaking by the Holy Ghost—the rejection of Him to heaven—becomes the turning-point; and then by the Lord from heaven is now called forth the witness of grace as well as of the glory of Christ. Finally, after the call of Saul of Tarsus, Peter himself (as well for other reasons as in order to cut off the semblance of discord in the various instruments of His grace) is brought in to show the perfect balance of divine truth and the wonderful harmony of His ways.



Thus the church would still retain its substantial character, and the testimony of God still bear the same common likeness, while room was left for whatever speciality of form God might be pleased to give the truth, and the unfolding of the ways in which God might employ one or another. Peter was the one then, not Paul, that announced the gospel to Cornelius, who by the Holy Ghost received it, and was not merely *safe* but *saved*. It was no longer simply a cleaving to a God of goodness who could not deceive and would not disappoint the soul that hoped in His mercy, but the conscious joy of knowing his sins all gone, and himself distinctly put on the ground of accomplished redemption as a known present thing for his own soul in this world. Such is salvation.

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Thus on the great Gentile occasion, as before on the Jewish at Pentecost, the medium of man completely disappears. It was as thoroughly according to God that the apostle *should not* lay his hands on any this day, as it was according to His wisdom that they *should* lay their hands on the Samaritans. It is granted that man sees difficulty in this: there is what he cannot reconcile; but be assured that the great point is, first, to believe. Settle it invariably that God is wiser than we. Is this too much to ask? After all, though it seems so simple as to be a truism, though nothing can well be conceived more certain; nevertheless, practically it is not always



the plainest and surest truth that carries all before it in our souls. But to believe is the secret of real growth in the revealed wisdom of God.

On this occasion they of the circumcision see that the Gentiles receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for they hear them speak with tongues and magnify God, and they were astonished. Then Peter says to them, "Can any man forbid water?" It was a public privilege he was warranted to confer on the Gentiles thus baptized of the Spirit. Water baptism is neither slighted nor is it put forward as a command or condition. The previous gift of the Spirit without the intervention of any human hand was the most effectual stopper on the mouths of the brethren of the circumcision who were ever prone to object, and would surely have forbidden water, if God had not undeniably given them the unspeakable gift of the Spirit. But this manifestation and fruit of gracious power silenced even the unruly and hard spirits of the circumcision. "And he commanded them to be baptized."

It may be observed passingly, that thus plainly baptizing is in no way a necessarily ministerial act. It may be all right and in perfect keeping that one preaching the gospel should baptize; but occasion might well arise where he who preached would avoid it himself. We know that Paul thanked God that so it was with himself at Corinth; and we see that Peter here did not baptize, but simply "commanded them to be baptized." God is always wise. It is too familiar how soon human superstition perverted this blessed institution of the Lord into a sacramental means of grace, duly administered by one in the line of succession.

The next chapter (xi.) shows us Peter having to give an account of himself before those who had not witnessed the effects of the mighty power of God in the house of Cornelius. When the matter is rehearsed, the great argument is this,—“Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” This brought the question to a simple issue; but here again, let it be noticed that the gift of the Holy Ghost belongs to those that believe. It is not His operation in enabling souls to believe, but a precious boon given to such as believed. “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” The Spirit of God alone quickens a person by faith in Christ. Without the action of the Holy Ghost faith is impossible; but this capacitating power and the gift of the Holy Ghost are two very different things, and the latter consequent on the former. If God had given them the Holy Ghost, as was manifest in sensible results, it was very evident that they must have by God’s grace had repentance unto life. The Spirit given to the believer was a privilege over and above faith, and supposed, therefore, their repentance unto life.

Then follows another grave fact. It appears that the scattered men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who had gone in consequence of the persecution everywhere, and among other places to Antioch, preaching the word to none but the Jews, took courage now and spoke (not to the *Grecians*—for this had been done long ago, but) unto the *Greeks*, preaching the Lord Jesus.” Those to

whom they addressed themselves were really Gentiles. The word "Grecians" does not mean "Greeks," but rather Greek-speaking Jews; to whom the gospel had been preached long before, as the cases of Stephen, for instance, and Philip clearly testify. Chapter vi. shows us the party in question murmuring. They were in the church already. But the point here is lost in our English version. There is a mistake, not only in our vernacular Bible, but also in the common Greek text which is equally faulty as the authorized version. The true text,\* which has sufficient if not the most ancient

\* The copyists of old seem to have confounded in writing, as the Latin and most other ancient translators did in rendering, "Ελληνας (Greeks) and 'Ελληνιστάς (Hellenists), here and elsewhere. Thus it might seem incredible, if it were not the notorious fact, that the only two known manuscripts in favour of that which is here most certainly requisite are the Alexandrian and the Cambridge Graeco-Latin of Beza. The Vatican and all others, uncial and cursive (as far as collated and known), support the error. Of the fathers, Eusebius among the Greek, and Cassiodorus among the Latins, are in favour of the true; others are in strange conflict, their text having the wrong reading (perhaps through mistaken scribes), and their comment correcting it. The reading of the Sinai MS. (εὐαγγελιστάς) is a mere blunder, not uncommon in that most ancient but not very accurate document, arising from confusion through a contiguous word; it would give the sense of "unto the *preachers*, preaching the Lord Jesus." But the correction confirms the true reading.

The importance of closer attention to the text is well shown by Calvin's remarks on this verse. He was led into no small perplexity by the reading current in his day, and, to the shame of Christendom, still tolerated as the received reading. Yet his masculine good sense held to the truth, though he did not know the solid basis on which it here stands. I cite from the Calvin Tr. Society's edition of his Comm. on the Acts, i. pp. 466, 467. "Luke doth at length declare that certain of them brought this treasure even unto the Gentiles. And Luke calleth these Grecians not 'Ελληνες but 'Ελληνισταί[?]. Therefore some say that those came of the Jews, yet did they inhabit Greece [and

authority, tells us that they spoke to Greeks or Gentiles. Thus we see the Lord was working, and, as so constantly happens, it was not only that He called out Paul for the Gentiles; it was not only that He sent Peter to a Gentile; but now these men, who might have been despised as irregular labourers, were in the current of the same work of God, even if they knew nothing of it, save by divine instinct.

How blessed it is to see the free activity of the Holy Ghost without any kind of communication of man! It is always thus in the ways of God. It is not only that God uses one and another: this He does and we may bless Him that so He does; but the God who employs means is also above them, and He needs now only to

these would be right if the reading had been really 'Ελληνιστάς and not 'Ελληνάς]; which I do not allow. For seeing the Jews, whom he mentioned a little before, were partly of Cyprus, they must needs be reckoned in that number, because the Jews count Cyprus a part of Greece. But Luke distinguisheth them from those, whom he calleth afterward 'Ελληνιστάς [this is precisely where he is mistaken; his reasoning is sound, but his knowledge defective]. Furthermore, forasmuch as he had said that the word was preached at the beginning only by the Jews, and he meant those who, being banished out of their own country, did live in Cyprus and Phenice, correcting this exception, he saith that some of them did teach the Grecians. This contrariety doth cause me to expound it of the Gentiles." Quite right: only the true text delivers from the need of wresting the force of a word, and is as simply as possible Greeks, not Grecians, and means Gentiles without the smallest difficulty or discussion.

But it is still more strange as evidence of the slipshod criticism of the Reformers that Beza, who was more of a scholar than his predecessors, uniformly edits 'Ελληνιστάς, and writes a blundering note to the effect that it is here used in the sense of 'Ελληνάς. And yet he had in his possession that famous Græco-Latin Uncial (D) which he presented to the University of Cambridge in 1581, which MS. supports the Alexandrian.

draw out by circumstances the souls of some simple Christian men who had faith and love to seek the Gentiles without requiring the same vigorous and extraordinary means, under His mighty hand, as even the apostle did. Great workman as Peter was, he required the intervention of God in a vision to send him to do a work that these unnamed brethren undertook in their confidence of His grace, without any vision or sign whatsoever. It seems to have been the working of divine grace in their souls, and nothing else. At first they were more timid; they spoke only to Jews. By and by the power of the gospel and the action of the Holy Ghost fill their souls with desires as to the need of others. The Gentiles were sinners: why should they not dare to speak to the Gentiles? "And the hand of the Lord was with them," as we are told, "and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord." But what a rebuke is this to those that would make the church to be merely a creature of government, or in any wise to be of man's will, which is still worse. How blessed to see that it is a real organic whole, not only a living thing, but that He who is the spring of its life is the Holy Ghost Himself—a divine person, who cannot but answer to the grace of the Lord Jesus whom He is come down to glorify.

Next we find Barnabas stirred up to another and a characteristic enterprise. He had before this delivered Saul from the effects of undue anxiety and distrust in the minds of the disciples. He would have Saul to return good for what I may venture to call a measure of evil towards him. As there was need in the church at Antioch, he goes and finds him. He had a conviction



that this was the instrument the Lord would use for good. Thus we see that, while we have the angel of the Lord in certain cases, the Spirit of the Lord expressly in others, we have also simply the holy judgment of the gracious heart. This is all quite right. It is not to be treated as mere human arrangement. It was not only right, but recorded of God that we might see and profit by it. Barnabas was quite justified in seeking Saul. "And it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The place once so famous for its nicknames was now to give a name that will never perish—a name of incalculable sweetness and blessing, connecting Christ as it does with those that are His. It was, no doubt, a Gentile title. There would be no particular force in giving it to Jews, for all Jews professed to be looking for Christ. What a wonderful change for these poor Gentiles to know Christ for themselves, and to be called after Christ! All was ordered of God.

Then we find that if the church at Jerusalem had become impoverished, the Gentiles minister of their carnal things to them. Saul (as he is still called) and Barnabas are made the channels of bringing the contributions to the elders not named before. How these elders were appointed, if indeed they were so formally, does not appear. Among the Gentiles we know that they were installed, as we shall see a little later, by apostolic choice. Whether this was the case among the Jews scripture does not say; but that there were persons who had this responsible place among



them, as among the Gentile churches afterwards, we see clearly.

Finally, and in few words (for I do not intend to say more on chapter xii. to-night), we have the completing of this second part of our narrative in this chapter. We are given a striking prefiguration of the evil king that will be found in the latter day ; he that will reign over the Jews under the shadow and support of the Gentiles as Herod was, and not less but more than his prototype bent on the murder of the innocents, and with his heart full of evil for others who will be rescued by the goodness of the Lord.

James sheds his blood, as Stephen had before ; for this Peter was destined by man, but the Lord disappointed him. The disciples gave themselves to prayer, yet they little believed their own prayers. Nevertheless we learn hence that they had prayer-meetings in those days ; and so they gave themselves up to this special prayer for the servant of the Lord, who did not fail to appear by an agent of His providential power. All this confirms its having a Jewish aspect, regarded as a type, and was very natural in James and Peter, who had to do specially with the circumcision.

It is needless now to dwell on the scene, more than just to point out that which is familiar, no doubt, to many that are here—the manner in which the Lord judged the apostate ; for Herod—owned shortly after by the people whom he had sought to please, disappointed in one place, but exalted in another—was hailed as a god ; and at that moment the angel of the Lord deals with his pride, and he is devoured of worms

—a sad image of the awful judgment of God that will fall upon one who will sit “in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”

In the portion which follows we shall see the manner of the Spirit of God’s working by the great apostle of the Gentiles.

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## APPENDIX.

It may be interesting to many readers to read as follows from Mr. Edward A. Litton’s work on “The Church of Christ in its Idea, Attributes, and Ministry; with a particular reference to the Controversy between Romanists and Protestants.” There are, of course, imperfect expressions, inasmuch as the truth itself is but partially apprehended; but one is glad to see views so decidedly in advance of ordinary evangelicalism, with equal decision against mere churchism.

“In the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, the Christian dispensation is seen in actual operation; for that with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost that dispensation properly commences will probably be admitted by all parties. Moreover, in these chapters the Church of Christ is first spoken of as in actual existence. What in our Lord’s discourses is a matter of anticipation or prophecy, here appears as a matter of fact. Though not at first fully aware of the great change which had taken place in their religious standing, still less of its ultimate consequences, the first believers at once formed a separate community in the bosom of the Jewish theocracy; a community having, for its distinctive marks, adherence to the twelve Apostles, baptism in the name of Christ, and the celebration of the Lord’s

Supper.\* Thenceforth the Church becomes a matter of history; and its history is nothing less than that of the vicissitudes, prosperous and adverse, which the kingdom of God upon earth has in the lapse of ages passed through.

“It has already been remarked that, far from intending to establish a mere invisible fellowship of the Spirit, our Lord contemplated His Church as having a visible existence, His followers as collected into societies [that society called the Church or assembly of God]. With this view He Himself instituted certain external badges of Christian profession, to come into use when they should be needed, and took measures to qualify a small and select company of believers, by attaching them constantly to His person while His earthly ministry lasted, and giving them a formal commission with extraordinary powers, when He left the world, to preside over the affairs and direct the organisation of Christian societies. These essential conditions of the existence of any regular society we find from the very first in being in the Church: the Apostles were the officers, and, collectively, the organ of the community; members were admitted into it by baptism; and they testified their continuance therein by participating in the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood. As we advance further in the inspired history, we find additions made to these simple elements of social fellowship; the organisation of the Christian society becomes more complex and systematic; questions of polity and order occupy no small portion of the apostolic epistles; and we have every reason to believe, if not from Scripture alone, yet from the unanimous voice of authentic history, that towards the close

\* Is it not distressing to find, in this thoughtful production of one in much above the traditions of men and the bias of party, the palpable omission of the grandest and most momentous distinction of the church, namely, the presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven? Unbelief here is alas! characteristic of Christendom.

of the apostolic age Christianity had almost everywhere crystallised itself into a certain, definite, and well known form of ecclesiastical polity" (pp. 192, 193).

"St. Paul, in chap xiv. of the first epistle to the Corinthians, presents us with a graphic picture of the mode in which Christians in the first age of the Church celebrated public worship. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper constituted the visible symbol of their profession, and the pledge of their union with Christ and with each other; but the governing function in the assembly was the ministry of the Word, whether it assumed the extraordinary forms of 'tongues' or a 'revelation,' or 'prophecy,' or 'the interpretation of tongues,' or consisted of the stated instruction of regular pastors and teachers. Among the various spiritual gifts then common in the Church, the chief place was to be assigned to prophecy; for 'he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.' Of any typical or sacrificial element, St. Paul makes no mention: the whole service, with the exception of the Lord's Supper, was manifestly homiletic or verbal. That the gifts mentioned in the chapter were, for the most part, extraordinary, and in process of time were to cease, makes no difference as regards the argument; for it is the essential character of Christian worship, not the particular vehicle of its expression, that is the point now under consideration" (pp. 256, 257).

"The Church of Christ was not properly in existence before the day of Pentecost; much less did she, before that era, go forth on her mission to evangelize\* the world. A body of believers indeed had been by Christ gathered out of the Jewish people to be the first recipients of the Pentecostal

\* It is well to avoid a figure which churchism has ever turned to its own aggrandisement and the Lord's dishonour. The Church neither preaches nor teaches, but Christ sends those who evangelize the world and teach the Church.

effusion ; but before that event, this body could not be called distinctively His Church. It is, then, nothing but the fact, that the invisible Church, or rather that which in the Church is invisible, preceded that which is visible. The spiritual power which wrought so wonderful a change in the Apostles must first descend from heaven, and give to the Church its inner form as its spiritual characteristic ! afterwards the Apostles preach and organize. First, there are saints, or men in whom Christ is formed by an invisible operation of His Spirit, whose origin, however, is not unknown ; then these saints proceed to execute their appointed mission" (p. 272).

"Were the question put to a person of plain understanding, unacquainted with the controversies which have arisen on the subject, What, according to the Apostolic Epistles, is a Christian Church, or, how is it to be defined ? he would probably, without hesitation or difficulty, reply, that a Christian Church—as it appears, for example, in St. Paul's epistles—is a congregation or society of faithful men or believers, whose unseen faith in Christ is visibly manifested by their profession of certain fundamental doctrines, by the administration and reception of the two sacraments, and by the exercise of discipline. He would direct attention to the fact, that the ordinary greeting of St. Paul, at the beginning of each epistle, is to the 'saints and faithful brethren' constituting the Church of such a place, fellow-heirs with himself of eternal life ; and that throughout these compositions, the members of the Church are presumed to be in living union with Christ, reasonings and exhortations being addressed to them, the force of which cannot be supposed to be admitted, except by those who are led by the Spirit of God ; in short, that the members of the Corinthian or the Ephesian Church are addressed as Christians ; and a Christian is one who is in saving union with Christ."

"In proportion to the apparent simplicity of the question,



would be his surprise to hear it affirmed that he is mistaken, and that, in addressing a Christian society as a congregation of Christians, St. Paul merely regards it as a society of men *professing* the same faith, and participating outwardly in the same sacraments (it being immaterial to the idea whether they possess saving faith or not); a society invested with spiritual privileges, but not necessarily realizing those privileges, and that, consequently, we must lower the import of the terms, 'saints' and 'faithful in Christ Jesus,' to signify outwardly dedicated to God, and professing with the lips the doctrines of Christianity. . . . That the mode of interpretation alluded to involves a deviation from the obvious meaning of the New Testament phraseology is not, indeed, sufficient reason for at once rejecting it; but it does warrant us in requiring that the necessity for such deviation shall be clearly made out. And in the present case this requirement is the more reasonable from the circumstance that the Apostles uniformly identify themselves, as regards their Christian standing and hopes, with those to whom they write. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed *us* with all spiritual blessings in Christ;' 'that I may be comforted by the mutual faith both of you and me;'—did St. Paul, when he thus wrote, regard himself as but nominally interested in the blessings of redemption? Was his faith nothing more than a profession of Christian doctrine? If he must have meant something more than this; if his own faith and his own sanctity were living and real, the effect of the Holy Spirit's operation; then, inasmuch as he makes no distinction as regards this point between himself and those whom he addresses, we must suppose that he looked upon them also as real saints and believers. The language of the inspired writers of the New Testament is the expression of that Christian experience, or conscious participation in the blessings vouchsafed through Christ, which the Holy



Ghost had shed abroad in their hearts: their idea therefore of a saint, or a believer, being derived from their own spiritual consciousness, must have been the highest of which the words will admit. But in the sense in which they supposed themselves to be Christians, do they, to all appearance, apply that title to those to whom they write" (pp. 280-283).

To the argument drawn from the use of similar terms under the Mosaic covenant in a merely national and external sense to prove that they mean the same, and nothing more, under the gospel, our author answers, "Here, in fact, is the real source of the error. While the typical character of the Mosaic institution in general is recognised, it has not been sufficiently borne in mind that the Jewish nation itself in its external or political aspect, was a type, and nothing more, of the Christian Israel. . . . We have only to extend this undoubted principle of interpretation to the Jewish people itself in its national—that is, its legal—character, to perceive that the terms by which, in the Old Testament, its privileges are expressed, assume, when applied to Christians, a different meaning, or rather betoken the spiritual realities of which the former were but the types" (pp. 286, 287).

"To all this, however, it will be replied, that the nature of a visible church, which we know must in all cases be a body of mixed character, as well as the actual state of several of the churches to whom St. Paul addressed his epistles, forbid the supposition that, in terming them communities of saints and believers, he could have used these words in their highest signification. This is the second difficulty which it is conceived lies in the way of our interpreting the apostle's language literally. But a moment's reflection will show that the difficulty is only imaginary. We must recollect that in the Apostolic Church an effective discipline—the very idea of which seems to be lost amongst

us—existed. By means of this discipline, they having been separated from the society whose overt acts were contrary to their Christian profession, the apostle, not being endowed with the divine prerogative of inspecting the heart, was compelled to take the rest at their profession, and to deal with them as real Christians so long as there was no visible, tangible proof to the contrary. . . . Without pronouncing upon the state of individuals in the sight of God, he assumed the whole body to be what they professed to be—a body of real Christians. For it must be remembered that, however far his profession may be from being a true one, every professor of Christianity professes to be a true, not a mere nominal, Christian. Except on this assumption the apostle could not have proceeded to enforce Christian duties by Christian motives” (pp. 298, 299).

“Nor is there any weight in the objection that many of these primitive Churches were very defective in doctrine or in practice, or in both; that St. Paul speaks of the Corinthians as being, on account of their divisions, ‘carnal,’ and not ‘spiritual,’ as ‘babes in Christ,’ and sharply reproves them for their laxity of discipline in the case of the incestuous person, and their want of discipline in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. For it is not maintained that the first Christians, any more than those of our own day, were or could be perfect; and all that can be fairly gathered from what St. Paul says of the Corinthians is, that they were imperfect and inconsistent. In the remarks sometimes made upon this subject it seems to be assumed that there is no medium between our affirming of persons that they are not perfect Christians, and that they are not Christians at all; whereas in fact there is no Christian, however holy, who comes up to the ideal of Christian practice. . . . To return to the case of the Corinthians:—on what principle, let us ask, did St. Paul reprove them for their inconsistencies?

Did he address them as absolutely destitute of the vital principle of grace, or as possessing it, but needing exhortation to walk conformably thereto? The latter is, unquestionably, the ground which he takes" (pp. 302, 303).

"Christianity, as it appears in the New Testament, knows nothing of the atomistic theory of modern independentism. There can be little doubt that, even in the apostolic age, the church of each considerable city—such as Rome or Ephesus—consisted, not of one congregation, but of several, who were collectively styled the church of that place; certain it is that such was the case towards the close of the first century. It could not be otherwise. The expansive power of Christianity called it to break forth on all sides; and speedily the original congregation, or in modern language the mother church, of each city gave birth to other societies of Christians in the surrounding neighbourhood. . . . No notion is more at variance with the spirit of apostolic Christianity than that of societies of Christians existing in the same neighbourhood, but not in communion with each other, and not under 'common government'" (pp. 449, 450).

"It is a perilous mode of reasoning, and likely to lead to universal scepticism, to maintain, for the sake of theoretical consistency, that the visible fruits of the Spirit do not possess a sufficiently distinctive character to enable us to pronounce where they are and where they are not: not to mention that the sin of denying the evident operation of the Holy Spirit is spoken of by our Lord in terms far too awful not to make us tremble at the thought of verging towards it. The fruits of the Spirit, whether they be produced within our own inclosure or beyond it, are always the same, and always to be recognized; otherwise our Lord would never have given us the simple test whereby we are to distinguish false from true prophets—'by their fruits ye shall know them.' If men profess themselves not to be able to do so,

they simply profess that they have neither consciences nor moral sense." [Alas! the power of the Spirit to this end is lost sight of.] . . .

"One visible manifestation, then, of the sanctity of the Church is the holy walk and conversation of individual Christians; but there is another, and more formal, mode in which she professes herself to be holy, and that is, by the exercise of discipline. The personal holiness of the Christian is a property of the individual, not of the society as such; hence a professing Christian society, however large a proportion of holy men it may contain, does not predicate of itself that it is a part of Christ's holy Church as long as it exercises no formal official act implying that assumption. The exercise of discipline is the true and legitimate expression of the sanctity of a visible Church considered as a society. Hence the great importance of discipline. It is not merely that the absence of it operates injuriously upon the tone and standard of piety within the Church; it affects the claims of the society as such to be a legitimate member of the visible Church Catholic. A Christian society which should openly profess to dispense with discipline, and tolerate on principle open and notorious evil doers [or still worse heretics, Antichrists, or their abettors] within its pale, would thereby renounce its title to one of the essential attributes of the Church; it would sever all ostensible connexion between itself and the true Church [or rather Christ and His sacrifice: see 1 Cor. v.], of which sanctity is an inseparable property; in short, it would unchurch itself. For every particular church is so called on the supposition of its being a manifestation, more or less true, of the one holy Church—the body of Christ. . . . How essential to the idea of a Church the exercise of discipline is, may be seen from the embarrassing contrarieties between theory and practice which the virtual suspension of it in the Church of England is constantly occasioning" (pp. 515–517).

### III.

#### THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

Chaps. xiii.-xx.

WE now enter on the missionary journeys, as they are called, of the apostle Paul. The work, under the Spirit, opens to the glory of the Lord. Not merely are Gentiles met in grace and brought into the house of God: He had already wrought in their souls individually—this we have seen before, in Peter's mission to Cornelius and his household; but grace goes out henceforth in quest not of Jews only but of Gentiles, as the special sphere which was assigned to Paul by God, and this also in co-operation with the other apostles; for thus they had agreed.

But there are preliminary circumstances of no little interest and moment, which the Spirit of God has been pleased to give us before the record of these journeys. I have read at the beginning of chapter xiii. the principal scene of this kind. Saul of Tarsus had already been called, but here we have a formal act of separation. This is the true description of it in scripture. It was in no way what men call "ordination." This he takes particular pains to deny in explicit terms. It was not only that man was in no sense the source of ministry; for this would be, no doubt, disavowed by the godly everywhere; but he employs the strongest words in

showing that it was not by men as the channel. As there are cases where man is the channel of conveying both a gift and authority, we can see how artfulness or ignorance can readily enough embroil the entire subject, and thus prepare the way for the building up of the clerical system. There is no ground for it in scripture. Ministry there is, and as a distinct though connected thing, an official charge: both are beyond question. These two things are clearly recognized by the Holy Ghost. Here we have nothing of official charge. So far as the apostle Paul had both a gift and a charge, and he had both (and the apostleship differs from the gift of a prophet as well as the rest in this, that it is not a gift only but a charge), all had been settled between the Lord and His servant. But now it pleased God at this particular epoch to call forth Barnabas, who was a kind of transition link between the twelve, with Jerusalem for their centre and the circumcision for their sphere, and the free and unfettered service of Paul among the Gentiles. It pleased Him to separate these two chosen vessels of His grace for the work to which He was calling them.

Let us look for a moment at the state of things at Antioch before we pass on. "And there were in the church" (or assembly) "that was at Antioch [certain]\* prophets and teachers." What is commonly called a stated ministry was there. All should give full weight to facts which if denied or overlooked would only weaken the testimony which God has given.

It is the continual effort of those who oppose

\* The best uncials, cursives, and ancient versions, omit *τινές*, "certain."



the truth of the church, and who deny the present ruined condition of it, to insinuate against such as have learnt from God to act on His own word, that they set aside ministry, and more particularly what they call "stated ministry." They do nothing of the kind. They deny an *exclusive* or one-man ministry. They deny that abuse of ministry which would shut out of its own circle the operation of all gifts but one, which is jealous of every other save by its own will or leave, which has no sufficient confidence in the Lord's call or in the power of the Holy Ghost given for profit, which consequently makes a duty of both narrowness and self-importance through a total misunderstanding of scripture and the power and grace of God. Not for a moment do I deny that all who are in any definite measure taught of God as to His will in the service of Christ must disavow clericalism in every shape and degree as a principle essentially and irreconcilably opposed to the action of the Holy Ghost in the church.

But it is important to affirm that none understand the action of the Spirit who expose themselves and the truth (which is still more serious) to the deserved stigma of denying the real abiding-place of ministry. This is not in anywise the question. All Christians who have light from God on these matters acknowledge ministry to be a divine and permanent institution. It is therefore of very great importance to have scriptural views of its source, functions, and limits. The truth of scripture, if summed up as to its character, amounts to this—that ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift. This I believe to be a true definition of it. The minds of most Christians are encumbered with the notion of a

particular local charge. Such a charge is altogether distinct from ministry: it is only confusion to suppose that they are the same thing, or inseparable. Ministry in itself has nothing to do with a local charge. The same person, of course, may have both: this might or might not be.

A man, for instance, as we find in the case of Philip and others, might have a local charge at Jerusalem; and there we saw the church choosing, because it was that kind of office which had to do with the distribution of the church's bounty. This is the principle of it. What the church gives the church has a voice in. But the Lord gave Philip a spiritual gift, and there the church bows and accepts, instead of choosing. In point of fact the particular gift that Philip received from the Lord was not one that properly finds its exercise within the assembly, but rather without: he was an evangelist. But this establishes what I have been asserting; that is, that you may have a person without a charge who has a very special gift, and this for public ministry.

The elders or bishops, of whom we shall hear more by-and-by, had a still more important charge. It was the office of oversight, or of a bishop, that was found in every fully-constituted assembly where there could be time for the development of that which was requisite in order to it. But whether there were charges or none, whether the due appointment was or was not, the Lord did not fail to give gifts for the carrying on of His own work. Now those persons who possessed gifts exercised them, as they were bound to do; for *here* was no question of appointment, and indeed their exercise had nothing whatever to do with the leave, permission, or authority

of any, but solely flowed from the Lord's own gift. This was properly ministry in the word. But there never was such an idea broached, still less acted on, as the exclusive ministry which in modern times has been set up, as if it were the only right thing in theory or practice. In point of fact it is thoroughly wrong, not only not defensible by the word of God, but flagrantly opposed to it.

Here, for example, we have the picture of an assembly drawn by the Spirit. It is the more instructive, because it cannot be pretended that here, as in the church at Jerusalem, there were elements which savoured of the anterior or Jewish state of things. It was among the Gentiles. It was where Saul himself laboured; but then there were other servants of the Lord beside Saul,—as Barnabas, and Simeon, and Lucius, and Manaen. Nor are these mentioned as if they were the only persons who there exercised the gifts of prophecy and teaching: no doubt they were the more important men. “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul” (for he is still called Saul, which was his Hebrew name) “for the work whereunto I have called them.” It was the Lord that called them.

But there is more than this: the Holy Ghost can also set apart among the servants to a peculiar service. This is emphatically brought in when it was a question of Barnabas and Saul. Not, of course, but that the Holy Ghost had to do with the action of a Peter, or a John, or of any others that have come before us in the previous accounts of this book; but it is expressly said here—and not without an admirable rea-

son, and of the deepest interest to us, because God is here preparing the road and instructing His servants as to His ways, more particularly in the church among the Gentiles. Hence, the Holy Ghost comes into a very decided and defined prominence here: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The Holy Ghost is in the church; He is personally acting, and not merely as giving power, but in distinct and special call. It is, no doubt, subordinate to the glory of the Lord Jesus, but, nevertheless, as a divine person must who does not abnegate His own sovereignty, so it is said "as he will."

"And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." This was not to confer authority, which would set one scripture against another. Galatians i. 1 denies such an inference. We shall find, before we have done with the history, what the character of this action was, and wherefore hands were laid upon them: the end of chapter xiv. explains it to us. It is said there (verse 26) that they sailed to Antioch (which was the starting-point), from whence "they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled." Such, then, was the object and meaning of the hands laid on Barnabas and Saul. It was not the presumptuous thought that men, who were really inferior to themselves spiritually, could confer upon the apostles what they did not themselves possess to the same extent; it was but a fraternal recommendation to the grace of God, which is always sweet and desirable in the practical service of the Lord. "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost:" nothing can be more distinct than the place

that the Spirit of God has assigned Him, nothing more emphatic than the manner in which the inspired writer draws attention to the fact in these commencing verses. All now depends upon His power: He is on earth, the directing power of all that is carried on. That power does not belong to the church, which has indeed responsibility in the last resort in the judgment of evil, but otherwise never can meddle with ministry except to the dishonour of the Lord, its own hurt, and the hindrance of ministry. On the the other hand, ministry never can meddle with what properly belongs to the church. They are two distinct spheres. The same person, of course, may be a minister while he has his place as a member in the body of Christ. But as he is not permitted to use his ministry to override the church in any respect, but rather to subserve its right action, helping it on as far as may be in his power by the Holy Ghost, so on the other hand the church can in nowise rightly control that ministry which flows not from the church, but directly from the Lord.

The present state in nowise alters or modifies the principle: on the contrary, it is an immense comfort that as ministry never did flow from the church, so the present broken state of the church cannot overthrow the place and responsibility of those who minister in the word. The fact is they are quite distinct, although co-ordinate, spheres of blessing.

Barnabas and Saul go forth, then, to Cyprus, the native place of Barnabas; and coming there they preach the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. There is great care, and so much the more because Saul was apostle of the Gentiles, to go to the Jews; and it is



lovely to see the ways of God in this respect. Above all others Luke, as we know, brings out the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His grace towards the Gentiles. Nevertheless there is no gospel so eminently Jewish as Luke's in its commencement,—not even Matthew's. We have no such scene in the gospel of Matthew, and still less in Mark's or John's,—no such scene of the temple both of the exterior and interior. We have no such account of the godly Jewish remnant. We have no such care in showing the obedience of Joseph and Mary to the requisitions of the law as in the first two chapters of the gospel of Luke. The fact is, that what is shown first in the gospel, then in the Acts, is “to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.” And so we find in the service of these blessed men who now go forth.

They had, by the way, also, we are told, John to their minister. We must not make an ecclesiastical institution out of this. No doubt the expression might to ignorant minds convey some such notion. Nor do I pretend to say what might have been the motives of those who translated it so as to give such a colour to the passage. Manifestly, however, the thing were absurd; because it would be, not a ministry to others, but to Paul and Barnabas. Clearly therefore Mark's service lay here, I suppose, in searching out proper lodgings, and getting people to hear the apostles preach, and that kind of care which a young man would be expected to bestow on those whom he was privileged to accompany and attend in the work of the Lord.

On this occasion they met with the deputy of the island, Sergius Paulus, who was besieged by the efforts of a certain sorcerer that sought to exercise and retain



influence over the mind of the great man. But the time was come for falsehood to fall before the truth. When he therefore attempted to turn his old arts against the gospel, and those that were the instruments of bringing it to the island, God asserted His own mighty power. For when Elymas withstood Barnabas and Saul, Saul, "who also is called Paul" (the Spirit of God taking this opportunity of bringing forward his Gentile name in a mission that was to be pre-eminently among the Gentiles, although beginning with the Jew according to the ways of God), being then filled with the Holy Ghost, sets his eyes on the evil worker, gives him his true character, searches him through and through, and, more than this, pronounced a sentence, a judicial sentence, from the Lord, which was at once accomplished. As we are told, "Immediately there fell upon him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand." It was the sad sign of his guilty race, the Jews, who, by their opposition to the gospel of the grace of God, and more particularly among the Gentiles, are now doomed to the same blindness after a spiritual sort. "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." Beautiful contrast with Simon Magus! What astonished Simon Magus was the power displayed; what astonished the deputy was the truth. The admiration of power is natural to man, and particularly to fallen man. He, conscious of his weakness, covets the power that he would like to wield, having still the consciousness of the place to which he was called, but from which he has fallen; for God put every creature under him, and although through sin he is fallen from his estate, he has

in nowise abandoned his pretensions, and he would fain have the power that would enable him not to hold up only, but to reverse if possible the sad consequences of the fall. Delight in the truth, a heart for that which God reveals, flows only from the Holy Ghost; and this was the happy portion of the deputy. He believed, and believed after a very different sort, with a divinely exercised conscience by the power of the Spirit, instead of a merely intellectual credit receiving upon evidence that which approved itself to the judgment of his mind.

Next we read of Paul and his company, for from this moment he takes the chief place, and others are designated because of their companionship with him. Was this place in anywise contrary to the will of the Lord? Was it not thoroughly according to it? We all know that there is sometimes a little jealousy of any such spiritual influence. I cannot but think, however, that the feeling is owing more to the natural independence of the mind, than the simplicity that delights in the working of the Holy Ghost and the sanctioned expression of God's holy word. I say, then, that Paul and his company "loosed from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John, departing from them (for he was not at all in faith up to the level of the work—at any rate of Paul), returned to Jerusalem," his natural home.

The others proceed on their way to Antioch in Pisidia, and there they are found on the sabbath-day in the synagogue. "And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the ruler of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any

word of exhortation for the people, say on." What a painful contrast with that which is found in Christendom! Even among the poor Jews, spite of all the coldness and narrowness of their system, there was then a greater openness of heart, and a simplicity to receive whatever could be communicated, than one sees where there ought to be the rivers of living water,—where there should reign the cherished desire among all that belong to the Lord, that the best help at all cost be rendered to every saint of God, as well as to every poor perishing sinner. However, here among these Jews, the rulers were anxious to get all the help possible from others for the understanding of the word of God, and for its just application. Although they knew nothing whatever of Paul and Barnabas (except, of course, that they were Jews, or looked like them), they called on them forthwith to address all. "And Paul beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God."

There were proselytes as well as children of Jacob. Many Gentiles had renounced idolatry in all the great cities where Jews were found at this time. Undoubtedly, so far, Judaism had prepared the way for the Lord among the nations of the earth, in whose midst Jews were scattered. Disgust had grown up in the Gentile mind. The abominations of Paganism had risen up to a fearful height. At this very time there were not a few who though Gentiles were not idolaters (and you must bear this in mind), and really did fear God.

To all these Paul addresses himself: "The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and

with an high arm brought he them out of it." The history is pursued until he comes to David, as the object, of course, was to bring in the Son of David; for the apostle, led of the Lord, speaks with that considerate skill which love does not fail to use, formed under the Spirit of God. Thus having brought in the Messiah, we are shown how He had been announced by the Baptist. There was no collusion about it. John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. As he fulfilled his course, he acknowledged that he was not the Messiah. Thus God gave an admirable witness of the Messiah that was just at hand. It was no question of a great man, or great deeds, but of God's accomplishing His purpose. Had a particle of ambition influenced John, he, with an immense following among the people, might readily have set up to be the Messiah himself. The truth was, that he was not the Bridegroom but His friend, and the fear of God shut out these base desires, and he felt it his joy and his duty to do the will of God, and be the witness of Him that was coming.

Thus Paul announces the Messiah himself. "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent." Next he brings boldly forward the awful position in which the Jews had put themselves. "They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him." Along with spiritual blindness there was as usual the grossest want of common righteousness. "And though they found

no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre." God was against them, and as for the man whom they had crucified, He "raised him from the dead: and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus."

It is not warrantable to say "raised up *Jesus again*." You may read it either "raised up *Jesus*," or "raised *Jesus again*;" but you cannot give both. The word cannot at the same time include both, though it may in certain cases, according to the context, mean either. The proper rendering here is "raised up Jesus." This is the meaning required by the facts. It refers to Jesus given to the Jews as the Messiah according to the prophets. It is also the commonest thing possible for the word to apply to resurrection. But then in itself it takes in a much wider range than simply resurrection. The word "raised up" requires "*from the dead*" to make it definitely mean resurrection. But this is not the case here, till we come to verse 34. I therefore believe that resurrection is not meant in the earlier text at all, but raising up Jesus as the Messiah, as it is also written in the second Psalm: "Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten thee." This is confirmed, and I think proved by the next verse, where we have the additional statement: "And as concerning



that he raised him up from the dead." Thus we have two distinct steps:—verse 33 affirms that God had fulfilled the promise in raising up the Messiah in the earth for His people; verse 34 adds that, besides this, He raised Him up from the dead. This is important, because it serves as a key to the true application of the second Psalm, which is often, and I believe mistakenly, applied to the resurrection. The reference is to the Messiah, without raising the question of actual bodily resurrection, which is first introduced distinctly in Psalm xvi., though implied in Psalm viii. So, in the Apostle's discourse, the resurrection from the dead is founded not upon the second Psalm, but on a well known passage in the prophet Isaiah (lv. 3), and also in the sixteenth Psalm already referred to.

But here the apostle (instead of pointing out that God had made the rejected Jesus to be Lord and Christ, which was Peter's doctrine, and, of course, perfectly true) uses it according to his own blessed line of truth, and urges on their souls, that "through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him" (not the Jew alone, but) "all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Thus early, vigorously, and plainly did the apostle proclaim this great truth—no doubt for all among the Jews who bowed to it, but stated also in terms that should embrace a Gentile believer even as an Israelite. The law of Moses could justify from nothing. "All that believe are justified from all things." The whole is wound up by a solemn warning to such as despise the word of the Lord, and this founded on or rather cited from more than one



of their own prophets. (Compare Isaiah xxix. and Hab. i.)

“And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas : who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.” This stirred up the Jews : it was a new element, and kindled their jealousy at once. We have had the irritation and the murderous opposition of the Jews in Jerusalem. We can understand that they disliked what they considered a new religion, which claimed to come with the highest sanction of the God of Israel, more particularly as it made them feel to the very quick their own sins, their present and past resistance of the Holy Ghost, as well as their recent slaughter of their Messiah. But a new feature comes out here which the Spirit of God lets us see henceforth in all the journeys and labours of the apostle Paul ; that is, the hatred which the unbelieving Jews felt at the preaching of the truth to the Gentiles. “When the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy.” The scene now lay outside among the nations whom they despised. If the gospel were a lie, why feel so acutely ? It was not love or respect for Gentiles. But Satan stirred up, not now simply their religious pride but their envy, and, filled with it, they “spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.”

The law had never wrought such a change among men.

It might correct the grossness of idolatry and condemn its folly, thereby some here and there might fear God ; but it never did win hearts after such a sort. Thus the evil of their own hearts was brought out among the Jews, and the more in proportion as the might of the grace of God proved itself in attracting souls to the Lord. "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you." How wondrous and how beautiful the ways of divine love ! "But seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life"—how solemn to judge oneself unworthy of everlasting life, as every unbeliever does !—"lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

This was spiritual wisdom ; but was it simply instinct ? It was not. There may have been those that turned to the Gentiles from no deeper or more defined reason, as we saw last night. There were those who perceived that the gospel was too great a boon to be confined to the ancient people of God, that it was adapted to the universal need of men, and that it became God's grace to let it forth to the Gentiles ; and they acted on their conviction, and the Lord was with them, and many believed. But it was not spiritual instinct here : it was a still holier and lowlier thing, yet higher and more blessed. It was intelligent obedience, where it might not be supposed that one could find a sufficiently clear direction. But the eye of love can discern ; it is ever on the alert to obey from the heart.

"For so," says he, "hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles." What had this to do with Paul and Barnabas ? Everything. Beyond controversy Christ is directly in view of

the prophet, and perhaps some would be disposed to shut up the words only to Christ; but not so the Holy Spirit, who *therefore* extends its bearing to Paul and Barnabas. Did not Paul afterwards write "to me to live is Christ"? Christ was all to them. Christian faith appropriates to itself what was said to Him. What a place is this! what a power in His name! No doubt it was heretofore a hidden mystery that man should be so associated with a Christ rejected by (and so separated from) the ancient people of God. But what said He to the man despised and set at naught by them? This was the very time when the Messiah, lost to Israel, becomes, in a new and intimate way, the centre for God to associate fully in grace with Him. Thus what belongs to Him belongs to them, and what God says about Him is direction for them. "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

There was no rashness or presumption, but the soundest wisdom in this. Was it only for the Apostles? Is there no principle in this of all importance for us, my brethren? Does it not prove distinctly that it is not merely where we get a literal command that we may and ought to discern a call to obedience? The apostles, as men of faith, were bold about it: "For so hath the Lord commanded *us*." Yet, I suppose, not two souls besides in the whole earth would have seen a command to them. Unbelief would have asked proof, and have been ill-satisfied; but faith, as evermore, is happy and makes happy. "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And

the name of the Lord was published throughout all the region." But the Jews were not to give up their envy. The greater the blessing, the more their hearts were vexed with it. "The Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women." They were more open, doubtless, to their efforts; and so were "the chief men of the city." As faith looks to God and the truth, unbelief flies to influence of one kind or another,—of females on the one side, and of great men on the other. Thus they raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. "But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost." As the enemy makes good the occasion of evil, so God turns the wickedness of the adversary to the blessing of His own.

The apostles pass thence into another place; they are, as ever, unwearied in their love. There is, perhaps, no feature more noticeable and instructive than the fact, that nothing turns away the heart of Paul from the poor Jews. He loved them with an unrequited affection; he loved them spite of all their hatred and their envy. Into the synagogue he went again here (as in each new place that he visits), and so spake, "that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews" (they were generally just the same to Paul in one place as in another) "stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the

city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled." They thus bowed to the storm. Nothing at all of what men call heroism marked the apostles; there was what is very much better—the simplicity of grace: patience is the true wisdom, but God only can give it.

They go accordingly elsewhere, and there preach the gospel. At Lystra, which they visited, the case came before them of a man crippled in his feet, "impotent in his feet," who had never walked. Paul, perceiving that he had faith to be healed, beholds him steadfastly, and bids him stand upright on his feet. The Lord at once answering to the call, the man leaped and walked. "And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." Accordingly they called Barnabas (who, it is evident, had the more imposing presence) Jupiter; and Paul, because he was the more eloquent of the two, they designated Mercury. "Then the priest of Jupiter"—for the city was famous for its devotedness to the so-called father of gods and men,—"brought oxen and garlands into the gates, and would have done sacrifice." "Which when the apostles,\* Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in

\* So the Spirit of God calls them both; and it is an important point to observe; it is not restricted to the twelve. Here we find the Holy Ghost acted in this manner. We have apostleship entirely apart from the twelve tribes of Israel. And not merely is Paul apostle, but Barnabas was recognized also.

among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein."

What is notable, I think, especially for all those engaged in the work of the Lord, is the variety in the character of the apostolic addresses. There was no such stiffness as we are apt to find in our day in the preaching of the gospel. Oh, what monotony! what sameness of routine, no matter who may be addressed! We find in scripture people dealt with as they were, and there is that kind of appeal to the conscience which was adapted to their peculiar state. The discourse in the synagogue was founded on the Jewish scriptures; here to these men of Lycaonia there is no allusion to the Old Testament whatever, but a plain reference to what all see and know—the heavens above them, and the seasons that God was pleased from of old to assign round about them, and that continual supply of the fruits of His natural bounty of which the most callous can scarce be insensible. Thus we see there was the ministration of suited truth, as far as it went, of what God is, and what is worthy of Him, opening the way for the glad tidings of His grace. How different from the vileness of a Jupiter or of a Mercury, a god devoted to corruption and selfwill, and another god devoted to stealing! Was this the best religion and morality of the heathen, making gods just like themselves? Such certainly is not the true God. Who can deny all to be vanity even in the minds of the most civilized and



refined of the Gentiles? The true God, although He had suffered all nations to walk in their own ways in times past, nevertheless did not "leave himself without witness in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." This was no more than an introduction for that which the apostle had to say; it was the truth so far rebuking the folly of idolatry. It was in no way the good news of eternal life and remission of sins in Christ; but it was that which either vindicated God, or at least set aside what was undeniable and before all eyes the debasing depravity of their false gods and pagan religion.

"And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." "And having stoned Paul"—how like his Master! How sudden the change! About to be worshipped as a god, and the next thing after it to be stoned and left for dead! Alas! here also the Jews instigated the Gentiles. "Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." Such is the victory that overcomes the world; such the power and perseverance of faith. They go on undaunted, yea, confirming the souls of the disciples in various places, "exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Impossible for the world to overthrow those who bear the worst it can do, give God thanks, and wait for His kingdom.

But here take note of another part of their service—

the confirmation of the souls of those who had already believed. It is not simply bringing souls in, and then leaving them to other people; the apostles would stablish them in the faith as they were taught. But this was not all. "When they had ordained them." Let me take the liberty of saying that "ordained" is a very misleading term, which conveys an ecclesiastical idea without any warrant whatever. Not that "ordained" is an interpolation here as in the first chapter of Acts, but certainly the meaning given is fictitious. The true force of the phrase is simply this, "they chose them elders." In more ways than one it is important; because, as a simple choice takes away "ordination," and with it that mysterious ritual which the greater bodies like, so on the other hand the apostles' choosing for them elders takes away all that gives self-importance to the little churches. For it is neither the smaller bodies choosing for themselves, nor an imposing authority vested in their great rivals, but a choice exercised by apostles; that is, they chose *for* the disciples "elders in every church."

I am well aware that persons of respectability have not been wanting who have tried to make out that the Greek word means that the apostles chose them by taking the sense of the assembly. But this is mere etymological trifling. There is not the slightest warrant for it in the usage of scripture. It is not requisite for a man to be a scholar in order to reject the thought as false. Thus the word "*them*" refutes it for any intelligent reader of the English Bible. It is not merely that apostles chose. If it be said that the people must have chosen for them to ordain, the answer is, that the people did not

choose at all. This is proved by the simple declaration that the apostles chose *for* the disciples. Such is the way to fill up the sentence—"They chose them elders."\* To make out the meaning of what Presbyterians or Congregationalists have contended for, it should have been said that they chose *by* them, or some phrase meaning that they chose by the votes of the assembly. Here there is no ground whatever for such a sense, but on the contrary that the apostles chose elders for the rest.

\* It is scarcely necessary to refute at length the notion of the fathers, and of some moderns like Bishop Bilson (Perpetual Government of Christ's Church, p. 13, Eden's edition, Oxford, 1842), that χειροτονήσαντες here means ordaining by imposition of hands. That the word was so used in later times by ecclesiastical writers is true; that this is its meaning in scripture is palpable error. It is to confound χειροτονία with χειροθεσία (or its equivalent, ἡ ἐπίθεσις τῶν χειρῶν). On the other hand the idea that χειροτονήσαντες means that the apostles conceded to the disciples the power of selecting by vote, whilst they reserved to themselves the right of approval and institution, is still harsher and in short unexampled in all Greek writings profane or sacred, ancient or mediæval. In the earlier Greek authors who write of their public affairs, the word often occurs in the sense of choosing by suffrage (as opposed to lots); later on it meant appointment irrespective of votes. But it is never used, so far as I know, to express that *some* appointed on the ground of election by *others*. And I am glad to say not merely that a candid Presbyterian like Prof. G. Campbell treats Beza's version (*per suffragia creassent*) with the utmost severity as "a mere interpolation for the sake of answering a particular purpose," but that the Presbyterian divines of 1645 in the "Jus Divinum" point out the flagrant inconsistency of such an interpretation with the express language of the text. None but Paul and Barnabas chose (whatever the manner); and they chose *for* the disciples, not by their votes, which would be incompatible with their own choice. Compare Acts x. 41, 2 Cor. viii. 19. In the former case God chose beforehand the witnesses, but others gave no votes; in the latter the churches chose brethren to be their confidential messengers, but they never thought of collecting the suffrages of other people. Scriptural usage in every instance is simply choice.

“They chose them elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, commending them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

It is vain to deny or parry the importance of this decision of scripture on the subject of presbyters. Not unfrequently there is an attack made on those who really desire to follow the word of God, by men who ask, “Where are your elders? You profess to follow scripture faithfully: how is it that you have not elders?” To such I would answer, “When you provide apostles to choose elders for us, we shall be exceedingly obliged for both.” How can we have elders appointed according to scripture unless we have apostles or their delegates? Where are the men now who stand in the same position before God and the assembly as Paul and Barnabas? You must either have apostles, or at the very least apostolic men such as Timothy and Titus; for it is quite evident that merely to call people elders does not make them such. Nothing would be easier than to bestow the title of elders within a sect, or for the law of the land to sanction it. Any of us could set ourselves up, and do the work in name, no doubt; but whether there would be any value in the assumption, or whether it would not be really great sin, presumption, and folly, I must leave to the consciences of all to judge.

Thus we know with divine certainty that the elders were chosen for the disciples by the apostles in every church. Such is the doctrine of scripture, and the fact as here described. It is evident therefore, that unless there be duly qualified persons whom the Lord has authorised for the purpose, and in virtue of their most singular relation to the assembly,—unless there be such

persons as apostles, or persons representing apostles in this particular, there is no authority for such appointment: it is mere imitation. And in questions of authority it must be evident that imitation is just as foolish as where it is a question of power. You cannot imitate the energy of the Spirit except by sin, neither can you arrogate the authority of the Lord without rebellion against Him. Notwithstanding, I do not doubt that this is often done with comparatively good—let us conceive the best—intentions on the part of many, but with very great rashness and inattention to the word of God. Hence those are really wrong, not to say inexcusable, who assume to do the work that apostles or their delegates alone could do, not such as content themselves with doing their own duty, and refuse a delicate and authoritative task to which they are not called of the Lord.

What, then, is the right thing? All that we can say is, that God has not been pleased, in the present broken state of the church, to provide all that is desirable and requisite for perpetuating everything in due order. Is this ever His way when things are morally ruined? Does He make provision to continue what dishonoured Him? So far from contrariety in this to the analogy of His dealings, it seems to me quite according to them. There was no such state of things in Israel in the days of the returned captives, as in the days of the Exodus, but Nehemiah was just as truly raised up of God for the return from Babylon, as Moses was for the march out of Egypt. Still the two conditions were quite different, and the mere doing by Nehemiah what Moses did would have been ignorance of his own proper place.

Such imitation would have possessed no power, and would have secured no blessing.

It is a precisely similar course that becomes us now. Our wisdom is to use what God has given us, not to pretend to the same authority as Barnabas and Paul had. Let us follow their faith. God has continued everything, not that is needful only, but far over and above it for the blessing, if not for the pristine power and order, of the church of God. There is not the slightest cause but want of faith, and consequent failure in obedience, that hinders the children of God from being blessed overflowingly even in this evil day. At the same time God has so ordered it, that no boast is more vain than that of possessing all the outward apparatus of the church of God. In fact, the louder the vaunt, the less real is the claim to ornaments of which God stripped His guilty people. None can show a display of order and charge so settled and regular, as to bear a comparison with the state of the church as it was founded and governed by the apostles.\*

Far from thinking that it is not good and wise, I admire the ways of the Lord even in this deprivation of ground for boasting. I believe that all on His part is thoroughly as it should be, and really best for us as we are. Nor is it that we should not feel the want of the godly order as of old; but I need not say that if we feel the want of elders, the value of apostles was incomparably greater. Apostles were far more impor-

\* "But it is a characteristic of the Church system" (says Mr. Litton in his "Church of Christ," p. 636, speaking of sacramentalists) "to be most peremptory and exclusive in its decisions where Scripture supplies the slenderest foundation for them."



tant than elders, and very much more the means of blessing to the church of God. But the right appointment of elders necessarily lapses with the departure of the apostles from the earth. It is not so with gifts, nor therefore with ministry; for all this is essentially independent of the presence of the apostles, and bound up with the living action of Christ the head of the church, who carries out His will by the Holy Ghost here below.

Now we enter upon another and an important chapter in its way, that is to say, the efforts of the Judaisers, who were now beginning (not to hinder the apostle's work merely, but) to spoil the doctrine which he preached. This is the particular point we may see in chapter xv. Accordingly the source of this trouble lay not among unbelieving Jews, but among such as professed the name of the Lord Jesus. "Certain men which came down from Judea, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When, therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem." Jerusalem, alas! was now the fountain of the evil: it was from the assembly in Jerusalem that this pest emanated. Satan's effort was to pollute the doctrine of the grace of God, who allowed that the authority and the power too of Paul and Barnabas should be entirely ineffectual to stop the evil. This was turned to good account, because it was far more important to stem the tidal in Jerusalem, and to have the sentence of the apostles, elders, and all

thoroughly against these evil doers, than simply the censure of Paul and Barnabas. It could not but be that Paul and Barnabas should oppose those that set aside their doctrines ; but the question for the Judaisers was, What about the twelve? Thus, the carrying of the question to Jerusalem was a most suitable and wise act. It may not be that Paul and Barnabas at all designed it as such—I do not suppose they did: no doubt they endeavoured to put it down among the Gentiles, but they could not do so. The consequence was that perforce the question was reserved for Jerusalem, where Paul and Barnabas go up for what Paul knew involved the truth of the gospel. “And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” Thus, you see, going upon this painful controversy, their hearts were filled with the grace of God. It was not the question they were full of, but His grace.

“And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things which God had done with them.” There again is uttered what filled their hearts with joy,—an important thing. For I am sure that often, where there is any duty of a painful kind, and where the heart of any servant of the Lord, no matter how rightly, gets filled with it, this very earnest pressure becomes really a hindrance. Because such is man, that, if you become thus over-occupied with it, others will infallibly put it down to some wrong object on your part; whereas on the contrary, others do not so oppose where you trust the Lord simply, only dealing with the

matter when it is your duty to deal with it and passing on. Meanwhile, your heart goes out to that which is according to His own grace; and there is so much the more power, when you must speak on that which is a matter of pain.

It was thus according to the grace and wisdom given to these beloved servants of the Lord. When the question came before them, "there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed." This is a new feature, it will be observed; that is, it is not merely the envious unbelieving Jews, but the working of legalism in the believing Jews. This is the serious evil that now begins to show itself. They insist "that it was needful to be circumcised, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." In fact they thought that Christians would be all the better for being good Jews. This was their object and their doctrine, if such it can be called. "And the apostles and elders came together to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing," &c.

All this leads us into the interior of those days, and proves that the idea of everything being settled just by a word is only imagination; it never was so, not even when the whole apostolic college were there. We find the liveliest discussions among them. "And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men [and] brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Peter we hear on this occasion

preaching Paul's doctrine, just as we saw that Paul might among the Jews preach somewhat like Peter:—God “put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ”—not “they shall be saved,” nor “*they* shall be saved even as *we*.” This is probably what we might have said, but it is not what Peter said. “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ *we* shall be saved,—we Jews shall be saved—even as they [the uncircumcised Gentiles].”

How sweet is the grace of God, and what an unexpected blow to the pretensions of the Pharisees that believed! And this too from Peter! If Paul had said it, there would have been less to wonder at. The apostle of the Gentiles (so they were prone to think) would naturally speak up for the Gentiles, but how about Peter? what induced the great apostle of the circumcision so to speak? and this in the presence of the twelve in Jerusalem itself? How was it that without the plan of man, and contrary no doubt to the desires of the wisest, the failure of Paul and Barnabas to settle the matter, conciliatory and gracious as they were, only turned to the glory of the Lord? It was the evident hand of God to the more magnificent vindication of His grace.

“Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James

answered, saying" (for he now takes the place of proposing or giving a judgment), "Men [and] brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: so that the residue of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord who doeth these things known from eternity."

Thus we see that in James's mind what Peter and Paul and Barnabas had pressed was according to the declarations of the prophets, not in conflict but agreement with them. He does not say more than this; he does not mean that such was their fulfilment; nor is any special application set before us. They teach that the Lord's name should be called on the Gentiles, not when they become Jews. That they should be blessed and recognized, therefore, was in accordance with prophecy. There were Gentiles as such owned of God, without becoming practical Jews by being circumcised,—Gentiles upon whom the name of the Lord was called.

This was the argument or proof from Amos; and it was conclusive. "Wherefore my sentence is (or, I judge), that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turning to God: but that we write to them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from the thing strangled, and from blood." This, in the latter part of it, is simply the precepts of Noah, the injunctions that were laid down before the



call of Abram, and, again, that which was evidently due to God Himself in regard to the human corruption that accompanies idolatry; so that things were then left in a manner alike simple and wise. There could be no right-minded Gentiles who would not acknowledge the propriety and necessity of that which the decree insists on.

“Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, having chosen to send men from among them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.”

It will be observed, by the way, that there were leading men among the brethren. Some seem jealous of this; others of hostile mind talk as if it contradicts brotherhood; but according to scripture, as in the nature of things, it is manifestly right. It is only crotchety people who have made a mistake. There must not be any allowance of jealousy where God speaks so plainly. This would be indeed to quarrel with the mercies of God among us. The letter was written, if I may so say, under the seal of the Spirit of God, from “the apostles, and elders, and\* brethren,” to the brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia. On its contents I need not enlarge: they are familiar to all.

“Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren (*i.e.*, at Antioch) with many words, and confirmed (*i.e.*, strengthened) them. And after they

\* There is very grave authority (N, A, B, C, D, &c.) for dropping καὶ, “and,” and so throwing together οἱ πρ. ἀδ. “the elder brethren” (in the sense, however, of “the elders”).



had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto those that sent them." (I give more exactly than in the common text.)

It was important to have the presence of men who were themselves competent witnesses of what had been debated and decided at Jerusalem. This was far more than being the mere and cold bearers of a letter. They knew the motives of the adversaries; they were familiar with the spiritual interests at stake, beside knowing the feeling of the apostles, and of the church at large. These men accordingly accompanied Paul and Barnabas. But this led also, in the wisdom of God, to an important point in the journeyings of the great apostle; for Paul and Barnabas, it is said, "continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also." (What largeness and love! How different from the days when an exclusive title protects unfit or haughty men, and money difficulties hamper both teachers and taught!) "And some days after Paul said to Barnabas" (the younger takes the lead), "Let us go again and visit the brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do."

Paul loved the church; he was not only a great preacher of the gospel, but he was deeply interested in the state of the brethren, and he valued their edification. Barnabas proposed to take with them John, who was also called Mark; Paul, however, would not agree to it. "But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder

one from the other." The Spirit of God takes good care to record this; it was needful that it should be noted. It should act as a warning; and, on the other hand, it would also prepare the minds of the children of God for the fact, that even the most blessed men may have their difficulties and differences. We must not be too much cast down if we meet with anything of the kind. I do not make this remark in any wise to make light of such disagreements, but alas! we know that these things do arise.

But there is more for our instruction: "Paul chose Silas." This is a weighty practical consideration. There are persons, I am aware, who think that in the work of the Lord all must be left absolutely without thought of one's own or concert to the Lord Himself. Now I do not find this in the word of God. I do believe in simple-hearted subjection to the Lord. Assuredly faith in the action of the Holy Ghost is of all importance,—both in the church, and also in the service of Christ. Yet there is not liberty alone but a duty of conferring together on the part of those who labour. There may be spiritual wisdom in what is often called "arrangement." So far from regarding it as an infringement of scripture, or of what is due to the Holy Ghost, I believe there are cases in which not to do so would be independence, and a total mistake as to the ways of the Lord. It is quite true that Paul would not have an improper person forced on him in the work. He had come to the conclusion that, though Mark might be a servant of the Lord and of course have his own right sphere, he was not exactly the labourer that was suited for the mission to which the Lord was calling himself.

Consequently his mind was made up not to take Mark with him. Barnabas, on the contrary, would have Mark with them, and at length so strongly urged this as to make it the necessary condition of his own association with the apostle. The consequence was that the apostle preferred even to forego the presence of his beloved friend and brother and fellow-servant, Barnabas, rather than have an unsuitable person forced upon him.

I have little doubt that the brethren in general judged, and this spiritually, that Paul was in the right and Barnabas therefore wrong. For the apostle chose Silas and departed, as we are told, "recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God," without a word about the brethren recommending Barnabas and John. Not that one would in the least doubt that Barnabas continued to be blessed of God. And as for John (Mark), we are expressly informed of his ability in the ministry at a later day. The apostle takes particular pains to show his respect and love for Barnabas after this in an inspired epistle (1 Cor. ix.); and what is yet more to the purpose, he makes the most honourable mention of Mark in more than one of his later epistles. (Col. iv. and 2 Tim. iv.) How good of the Lord thus to let us see the triumph of His grace in the end! And what a joy to the loving heart of the apostle to record it!

At the same time the entire history furnishes a most important principle in the practical service of the Lord. We ought not to be in anywise bound by an *esprit de corps*; where His testimony is concerned, we must be prepared to break with flesh and blood—to say to a father and mother, I have not seen them, neither to acknowledge one's brethren, nor to know one's own children. Nor

must we think overmuch about the trial ; for beyond a doubt many will be grieved by that measure of faithfulness to the Lord which condemns themselves. This we must bear as a part of the burden of His work. On the other hand, need it be said that nothing is more uncomely than a rudely personal and slashing habit with others in carrying out the will of the Lord ? There is in it neither grace, nor righteousness, nor wisdom, but self and self-deception ; for it looks like zeal—this fire of Jehu. At the same time there is such a thing as looking to God to have an exercised judgment, as to your associates no less than your work. The Lord alone can give the single eye with self-judgment which enables us in the Spirit to discern aright whom we ought to decline, and whom to choose, if companions offer or should be sought in the work.

In chapter xvi. we enter on some fresh points of interest. We have before us the first appearance of Timothy, who was afterwards to figure so much in the history of Paul and the service of the Lord. Here too we find a principle of no small moment for our guidance, and the more so as Paul did that for which, one can conceive, a great many might judge him. It is wonderful how apt people are, and especially those who do not know much, to judge such as know far better than themselves. There is nothing so easy as to form a judgment, but whether there be adequate grounds and a sound conclusion are other questions. Here the apostle is said to have taken Timothy (whose mother was a Jewess and his father a Greek, himself a disciple of good report among the brethren) to go forth with him. But, singular to say, Paul circumcises him. What

consternation this must have made amongst the brethren, especially the Gentiles! It was just after the battle of Gentile independence of circumcision had been fought and won. They surely must have thought that Paul was losing his wits himself to circumcise Timothy! Not even a Jew would have gone so far. Could it be that the apostle of the uncircumcision had at length succumbed to the adversary? or that he was swayed by his early prejudices so as to forget all his own past testimony to the cross and death and resurrection of Christ?

Now I do not hesitate to say, that so far from Paul being under legal prepossession in this act, on the contrary he never did anything in his course that showed him to be more completely above it. To circumcise Timothy was precisely what the law would not have done. It is well known that, if there was a mingled marriage (*i. e.*, between a Jew and a Gentile), the law would have nothing to say to the offspring. Legally the Jewish father could not own his own children born of a Gentile mother, or *vice versa*. (See Ezra x.) Now Timothy being the fruit of such a marriage, there could be no claim, even if there was license, to circumcise him; and (just because there was no such claim, he being on the one side sprung of a Greek, though his mother was a Jewess, because it could not be commanded) Paul condescends out of grace to those who were on a lower ground, and stops their mouths most effectually. Grace knows how and when to bend, no less than to be as unflinching as a rock; but this is precisely what even believers in general are least able to understand. Righteousness (that is, consistency with



our relationship) is not all. God is gracious, and so may we be by His grace, and thus feel how such as are really on a true and real ground of grace, and in a position according to the word of God, can have the truest sympathy with those who, though of God, are on a totally different ground, doing and saying what must astonish others possessed of little grace. Is not this a thing to be weighed? We may find, there is little doubt, the importance of it before we have got through our little career. It is a question that often comes up in various forms; but I believe there is only one means of solving it. While the heart thoroughly holds fast the truth of God, let us seek at the same time to understand the workings of that truth according to the grace of God.

This was the secret of the apostle's action here, but it did not hinder in the least his use of the decision arrived at in the recent council at Jerusalem. For "as they went through the cities, they delivered to them to keep the decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."

Then we find another important fact. Paul was stopped in his Asiatic journeyings, as we are told here, and "forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." So completely is the Spirit of God regarded as the directing person in the church. "After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit of Jesus (for such should be the text) suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, say-



ing, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." In various ways, therefore, divine guidance was never wanting.

Accordingly they come to the first spot in Europe that was blessed with the preaching of the great apostle of the Gentiles. They came to Philippi, "which is the first\* city of that part of Macedonia, a colony: and we were abiding in the city itself certain days."

Here we read of Lydia's heart opened, and of her household. The action of the Spirit as to the family seems to have obtained remarkably among Gentiles; among the Jews, as far as I know, we do not hear of it. We have found already districts among the Jews, as also among the Samaritans, which were powerfully impressed (to say the least) by the gospel; but among the Gentiles families seem particularly visited by divine grace as recorded by the Spirit. Take for example Cornelius the jailor, Stephanas: indeed you find it over and over again. This is exceedingly encouraging—especially to us.

But grace never acts in power without stirring up the enemy, and in ways calculated most to oppose and undermine. His tactics in Europe differed from those in Asia—at least in this the first place where the gospel was preached. The earliest case of any one or thing which the word of God names is, as a rule, remarkably charac-

\* Philippi was not the "chief" city of Macedonia, but Thessalonica; and as Wieseler has shown, even if the subdivisions had been known then of Macedonia Prima, Sec. &c., Amphipolis (not Philippi) was the chief city of that part or district. The literal and correct translation therefore is "first," geographically speaking. Eckhel (iv. p. 477, ss.) copies the coin, COL. AVG. IVL. PHILIP. It was therefore probably a colony founded by C. J. Cæsar, and afterwards increased by Augustus.

teristic. Applying this to what is in hand, we find that Satan's peculiar method in Europe was not so much by overt opposition but rather by affecting patronage. The maiden with the spirit of divination did not take the method of decrying the servants of the Lord but of applauding them. As it is said here, "she followed Paul and us" (for Luke was now with the apostle) with the cry, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation." This she did many days, for at first the apostle avoided action to give no importance by any assaults of an open kind on the evil spirit. But after no notice was taken for some days, he being grieved at her boldness turns and says to the spirit, "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." This roused the whole city.

The masters were troubled because the source of their gains was gone; and the magistrates disliked anything that produced an uproar. The result was that the multitude rose up together, the praetors rent off their clothes, and the apostle and his companion were beaten and cast into prison, with a charge to the jailor to keep them safely. There the Lord wrought marvellously. At midnight, while others slept, Paul and Silas in praying were singing the praises of God, who soon answered them. "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened." The consequence of the truth afterwards presented was in God's grace the conversion of the jailor. It is not now the time to dwell on the details, beautiful as the scene is, and attractive to the heart as it may well be. The praetors were soon forced to acknowledge the wrong they had done in

beating Romans uncondemned, contrary to the law of which they were the administrators. Thus the world was rebuked, the brethren comforted, and Paul and his companions departed to other fields of suffering and service.

The next chapter (xvii.) sketches for us the first entrance of the gospel into Thessalonica. It may be noted how remarkably the kingdom was preached there. But those of Berea earned for themselves a still more honourable character, being distinguished not so much by the prophetic style of teaching addressed to them, as by their own earnest and simple-hearted research into the word of God.

Finally, the apostle is at Athens, and there he makes one of the most characteristic appeals preserved to us in this striking book, but an appeal by no means to the credit of human refinement and intellect. For there is no place where the apostle condescends more to the elementary forms of truth, than in that city of art, poetry, and high mental activity. His text is taken, we may say, from the well-known inscription on the altar, "To the unknown God." He would let them know what, in the midst of their boasted knowledge, they themselves confessed they knew not. His discourse was pregnant with suited truth, for he points out the one true God, who made the world and all things therein—a truth that philosophy never acknowledged, and now denies, and would disprove if it were possible.

"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth"—another truth that unbelief disowns—that God is not only the maker

but the Lord, the master and disposer, of all—"He dwelleth not in temples made with hands." Thus the apostle finds himself at issue with both the Gentiles and the Jews. "Neither is worshipped (served) with men's hands, as though he needed anything,"—contrary to all religion of nature, wherever and whatever it may be. "Seeing he giveth" (such is His character) "to all men life and breath and all things; and hath made of one blood:" here again he is at issue with man's ideas, especially with those of Hellenic polytheism, for the unity of the human race is a truth that goes with that of the true God. It was seen among men that various races had each their own national god, and thus naturally the falsehood of many gods was bound up with and fostered the kindred pretension of many independent races of men. This was a darling idea of the pagan world. They held themselves to have sprung from the earth in some singularly foolish manner, at the same time maintaining that each was independent of the other. On the other hand, the truth which divine revelation discloses is that which man's mind never did discover, but, when propounded, at once brings conviction along with it. Is it not humbling that the most simple truth about the simplest fact should be entirely beyond the ken of the proudest intellects unaided by the Bible? One would think that man ought to know his own origin. It is just what he does not know. He must know God first, and when he does all else becomes plain. "He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth."

Again, "He hath determined the times before-appointed" (everything is under His guidance and govern-

ment); "and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him, and find him" ("*God*," it should be here, according to the best authorities: "The Lord" is not in keeping with the teaching in this place. He shows them that God is the Lord, but this is another matter), "though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets," &c. Thus he turns the acknowledgment of their own poets against themselves, or rather against their idolatry. Strange to say that the poets, however fanciful, are wiser than the philosophers. How often they stumble in their dreams on things beyond that which they themselves would have otherwise imagined! Thus some of the poets among them (Cleanthes and Aratus) had said, "For we are also His offspring." "Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead (the Divine) is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." How clearly was shown the folly of their boasted reason! What can be simpler or more conclusive? Since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that God can be made by our hands. This is in effect what their practice amounted to. Gods of silver and gold were the offspring of men's art and imagination.

"And the times of this ignorance" (what a way to treat the boasting men of Athens!) "God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Manifestly there is a thrust at conscience. This is the reason why he insists here on God's call to repent. It is no use to talk of science, literature, politics, religion. Old or new speculations in philosophy are alike vain. God



is now enjoining on all everywhere to repent. Thus he puts the sage down with the savage, because God is brought in as the judge of all. It is evident that divine truth must be aggressive; it cannot but deal with every conscience that hears it throughout the world. The law might thunder its claims on a particular people; but the truth deals with everybody as he is before God. The ground of the appeal too is most serious: "Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world." Solemn prospect! This he urges home on them, and in a manner peculiar but suitable to the moral condition of Athens.

God is about to judge the habitable earth (*οἰκουμένην*) in righteousness. He does not here speak of judging the dead. It is the sudden intervention of the man who, raised from the dead, is going to deal with this habitable earth. Such is the unquestionable meaning of the text. The "world" here means the scene dwelt in by man. It is in no way a question of the great-white-throne judgment. Certainly all that he put before them was admirably calculated to arouse them from their mythic dreams to the light of truth, without gratifying their love of the speculative. "He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

The allusion to the resurrection became at once the signal for unseemly jest. "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them." There was but little fruit even for the apostle and from this wonderful discourse.



Some, however, did cleave to him, and believed: "among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

But in the grossly voluptuous state of Corinth the gospel, strange to say, was to take a great and effectual hold on a certain part of the population. Not so at Athens: few were the souls, and comparatively feeble the work there. But in Corinth, proverbially the most corrupt of Grecian cities, how unexpected yet how good the ways of the Lord! He had much people in that city. It was an immense comfort, both in his labours there and afterwards, when the work seemed spoiled. He could still believe, and spite of all look for the recovery of those that had been turned aside. The Lord is ever kind and true; and so Paul went on with good courage, however tried and humbled on their account.

Here take note of another remarkable fact. The apostle does what is proscribed by all ecclesiastical canons, as far as I know, everywhere: that is to say, he works with his hands at the simple occupation of tent-making. "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come"—he takes this as the occasion for testifying to the Jews fully—being "pressed" (not exactly in the spirit, as it is said in the common text, but) "in regard of the word," he testifies that Jesus was the Christ. "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment," with the warning, "Your blood be upon your own head; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles."

Accordingly the work goes on among the Gentiles,

though the Lord was not without witness among the Jews. And this leads to a vast deal of feeling and clamour: "and all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat." Here the ruler was not only unwilling to entertain the question, but supercilious, and indifferent to the general disorder.

Just at the same time another remarkable feature appears here. In Cenchrea Paul shaves his head according to a vow. It is plain that, whatever might be the strength of divine grace, there was a certain concession to his old religious habits, even in the greatest of apostles, and the most blessed instrument of New Testament inspiration.

However this may be, the end of the chapter gives another remarkable witness of grace. Apollos is brought before us, taught by Aquila and Priscilla, who "took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." I doubt whether it would have been according to the will of God for a woman to have done so alone; but she, along with her husband, instructed him as they could. Now Priscilla, as I cannot doubt, knew more than her husband; it was therefore desirable that she should contribute her help. Still the Lord's ways are invariably wise; and it is very evident that it was in conjunction with her husband, not independently of him, that this grave task was carried on.

Another important fact opens chapter xix. Paul found at Ephesus a dozen disciples, who were in a very ambiguous position; for they were not exactly Jews,

and they were certainly not in the true sense Christians: they were in a transition state between the two. Does this appear to you at all startling? It is likely that it may disturb those who are in the habit of thinking, or at least saying, that all persons must be in one of the two states—that it is impossible to be in a middle position between them. But this is not the fact. It is always well to face the word of God; and God has written nothing in vain.

I say, then, that these men were recognized at Ephesus as believers, but it is very evident that they were not resting on the work of the Lord Jesus. They had faith, they looked to His person; but they had not intelligently laid hold of His work for the peace of their souls. So when Paul comes there and finds these disciples, he says, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Not the slightest doubt is started about their believing, but he *does* raise a very serious question about another thing:—"Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Why he asked this it is not for us to say for certain. It is likely that he saw something that indicated to his penetrating eye souls not at rest and in the liberty of grace. In spirit they were still under the law. It is the state described in the latter part of Romans vii. Of course I use this description with reference to Romans vii. by anticipation, because that Epistle was not yet written. But people were in that state before it was written as well as since; and the object of the epistle was to deliver them out of it.

Paul then enquired, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy

Ghost." It is not that they did not know the existence of the Spirit of God. Such is not at all the meaning of the text. All Jews had heard in the scripture of the Holy Ghost; and more particularly John's disciples were well instructed in the fact, not only of His existence, but that the Holy Ghost was about to be sent down on believers, or rather that they were going to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. This is what is referred to. Had that baptism taken place? They were not aware of it; they had not yet received the great blessing. Thus it is seen, they were believers, though they had not received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Such is the account that scripture gives of their state.

It is well to note this, because we may find persons now in a state somewhat analogous. There are many souls who are not at all in liberty, not having yet received the Spirit of adoption. Yet are they persons that we can truly accept as born of God; they detest sin; they love holiness; they really adore the Lord Jesus, having no doubt at all as to His glory, and that He is the Saviour. For all this they are not able to—what they call—"apply" the truth to their own case and settled relationship. They cannot always appropriate the blessing. They are not at ease and at liberty in their souls. We must not put such people down as unbelievers, on the one hand; neither must we rest, on the other hand, as though they had received everything. Those are two errors to which many are prone. Scripture allows neither, perfectly providing for every case. What the apostle did was this: he was far from questioning the reality of their faith, but he showed that it was not yet exercised on the full object of faith. They had not

yet entered into the just results of redemption. Accordingly he enquires how this came to pass—to what they had been baptized. They say, To John's baptism. This explains all. John's baptism was only transitional. It was of God, but it was simply in prospect of the blessing, not in possession of it. Such too was the state of these men. The apostle then puts before them the truth. "They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them ; and they spake with tongues."

This is highly important to be understood, though (I need not say) still more to be believed. We have the apostle in an exceptional way laying his hands on disciples in this condition, just as Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritan believers who thereby received the Holy Ghost. Thus God takes particular pains to show that the apostle Paul had the same sign and voucher of his apostleship as attached to Peter and John before. We are not, however, to suppose that a man cannot receive the Holy Ghost except by such an act: this would be a false impression and a misuse of scripture. As I have said elsewhere, and sought to explain long ago, the two general cases of the gift of the Holy Ghost are entirely irrespective of any such act ; the special cases, where hands were imposed, owed their existence to peculiar circumstances that do not call for detailed remarks at this late hour.

Then we hear of the mighty spread of the work,—not only the power with which God clothed the apostle, but also that which rebuked the superstitious use of the name of Jesus by those who without faith pretended to it. The chapter ends with the tumult at Ephesus.



In chapter xx. we learn the definitive usage, which the Spirit sanctions and records for us, of the Lord's day, or the first day of the week, as the fitting time for the breaking of bread. So we find it among the Gentiles in chapter xx. 7. I am aware that there are those who seem to think there is no liberty to break bread on any other day. I cannot but differ from such a conclusion. There appears to me full liberty to break bread any day provided that some adequate or just reason call for it: Acts ii. is, to my mind, conclusive authority for this. At the same time, while there is liberty to break bread, wherever there arises a sufficient ground for it in the judgment of the spiritual on any day of the week, it is *obligatory*, if we may use such a term on such a theme, on all saints walking with the Lord to break bread on the Lord's day, remembering always that the obligation flows from the grace of Christ, and is perfectly consistent with the most thorough sense of liberty before the Lord. In short, then, the regularly sanctioned day for breaking bread among the Gentiles is the first day of the week (not of the month, or quarter, or year); but under special circumstances the early disciples used to break bread every day. This appears to be the true answer to questions raised on this point.

Finally, in the same chapter (without entering into particulars at present), we may note the meeting of the elders\* with Paul, and the important truth that they

\* It may be observed here that those whom the inspired historian calls "the elders of the church" (*i. e.*, in Ephesus) the apostle designates overseers, or bishops (*ἐπισκόπους*). They are not in scripture two orders of spiritual rulers but one office. It is not merely that the bishops were styled presbyters (the higher dignity including the lower), but the presbyters Paul calls bishops, which could only be



are not thrown upon any successors to the apostle, nor does he speak of any successors in their own office, but "commends them to God and to the word of his grace." This is the more worthy of attention because he warns them of grievous wolves without, and perverse men from within. Thus there was every reason for speaking of succession, if it really possessed the place which tradition gives it, both to apostles on the one hand, and to elders on the other; but there is a marked absence of any such provision. Not only is it not pointed to, but a wholly different comfort is administered.

because they are both descriptive of the same men and office. This is supposed also in Phil. i. 1, 1 Tim. iii., Tit. i. 5, 7, 1 Peter v. 1, 2. On the other hand presbyters never appointed to that office, though an apostle associated them with himself in laying hands on Timothy when he conferred on him a *χάρισμα*. But scripture never calls Timothy a presbyter or bishop, but an evangelist, though he was also employed of the Lord in a highly responsible place at Ephesus, and seems to have exercised a quasi-apostolic charge over the presbyters as well as the saints in general there.

I am sorry to add an instructive sample of the blinding influence of ecclesiastical tradition over a pious mind at an early day. It is a citation from Irenæus' famous work against heresy (iii. xiv. 2), or rather the Latin version which alone represents him here:—"In Mileto enim convocatis episcopis et presbyteris, qui erant ab Epheso et a reliquis proximis civitatibus, quoniam ipse festinaret," &c. Undeniably there is a double misstatement here: (1) the bishops *and* presbyters must be regarded as at least contrary to fact; (2) they were expressly of the church in Ephesus, not from other neighbouring cities. We cannot wonder that later writers of less integrity and singleness of eye than the martyr bishop of Lyons went farther and without scruple in the effort to justify the growing departure from the normal state of the church, its doctrines, ministry, and discipline, as laid down in God's word. I could not but consider the note of Massuet, the Benedictine editor, a disgrace to a Christian scholar, or even to an honest man, if one did not bear in mind that the eyes of such persons are useless spiritually when they read the Fathers.

## EV.

### THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

Chaps. xxi.—xxviii.

THE closing chapters from xxi. to the end of the book are devoted to an episode full of interest and profit—Paul's course from Jerusalem to Rome. And here we find ourselves in an atmosphere considerably different from what we have had before. It is no longer the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, either inaugurating the great work of God on the earth at Jerusalem, nor His equally wonderful energy in breaking through the old bottles of Judaism, when grace flowed freely, first to Samaria, then to the Gentiles, and in principle, as we know, in due time to the ends of the earth. Neither have we the apostle separated, as it is said, unto the gospel of God. These were the three great divisions and the main contents of the book up to the point we are arrived at. But now the apostle is about to become a prisoner, nor this without warning. The Holy Ghost, as we may see on the surface of the verses I have read, admonished the apostle time after time; but the apostle shows us the most striking combination of what was truly heavenly in faith and life with the strongest clinging of heart to his brethren after the flesh. This is what makes the difficulty of appreciating his history by no means small.

But one may say that what was infirmity must be allowed to be infirmity on the noblest side (if any thing be so, which I do not deny,) of the human heart. Nevertheless we have the immediate effect in the lesson that even this does force us into altogether new circumstances wherein God never fails to magnify Himself. He knows how to turn even that which may have been in itself mistaken to His own glory, and then He in grace forms new channels and suited ways, not without a righteous judgment of the error even if it were in the best, and so much the more remarkably because it was in the best. And this I believe to be the prominent lesson of these later chapters of the Acts.

Let us, however, pursue the course of the divine instruction.

The apostle goes on his way and finds disciples, and tarries among them, as we are told, at Tyre for "seven days." This seems to have been a common term of stay—we can readily conceive why. One great reason, I do not doubt, was to enjoy the fellowship of the saints together, to spend with the Christians in a new place that day which has the strongest possible claim on the heart that is true to Jesus—the first day of the week. This was expressly shown in chapter xx. The Spirit of God does not repeat the same express statement here. Nevertheless I do not think we are far astray if we connect the seven days of the apostolic visit with that which was stated plainly in verses 6, 7, of that chapter. At Troas it was said that "we abode seven days; and upon the first day of the week, when the disciples (or rather, *we*) came together to break bread, Paul preached." Here there is no such positive affirmation,

but still the mention in a similar way of seven days with the disciples may well open a question for spiritual judgment what the motive was for such a term. I do not doubt myself that it was to have the joy of meeting all saints in each locality as opportunity served, and of cheering and strengthening them on their course.

No doubt the spiritual instincts of the children of God would lead them always to desire to be together. For my own part I cannot understand a child of God who on principle could abstain from any occasion that summoned round the name of the Lord the members of the household of faith. It appears to me that, far from being a waste of time or from any other object being of the same moment, it is simply a question whether we value Christ, whether we truly are walking in the Spirit, if we live in the Spirit, whether the objects of the constant active love of God are also in measure the objects of our love in Christ's name.

I think therefore that it is according to the Lord that the children of God should if practicable be together every day. To this the power of the Spirit would lead: only the circumstances in which we are placed in this world necessarily hinder it. Therefore the true principle according to the word of God is a coming together whenever it is practicable; and we do well to cherish a real exercise of heart and conscience in judging what the practicability is, or rather whether the impracticability be real or imaginary. Very often it will turn out to be in our will, an excuse for spiritual idleness, a want of affection to the children of God, and a want of sense of our own need. Accordingly obstacles are allowed in own minds, such as the claims of business, or the

family, or even the work of the Lord. Now all these have their place. Surely God would have all His children to seek to glorify Him, whatever may be their duty. They have natural duties in this world; and the wonderful power of Christianity is seen in filling with what is divine that which without Christ would be merely of nature; and this should ramify the whole course of a man's life after he belongs to Christ. And so again the claims of children for instance, or parents, or the like, cannot be disputed; but then if they are really taken up for Christ, I do not think it will be found that it is to the loss of either parents or children, or that the little time is missed in the long run that is spent in seeking the strength of the Lord, and in communion according to our measure. We ought to be open for both; and we shall ourselves never have any power to help unless we have the sense of the need of help from others; but both will be found together.

It appears to me that through the blessed apostle the Spirit of God gives us in these passing touches, and in recounting them, valuable hints as to the spirit that animated him in his course. We may know in some slight degree what it is to be long on a journey without due rest, food, or shelter; and passing from one country and continent to another was by no means then the easy thing that it is in modern times. We have all the habit of being rapidly enough in motion, and anxious to get to the end. We can understand how the apostle, with so many hindrances in the way, might feel the comfort of these repeated stays, seven days in one place, seven days in another, as we have seen, expressly showing the desire of his heart after communion as well as



confirming their souls. Such is what we find in this blessed man's course: in our little measure surely it ought to be so with us.

On this occasion, however, the disciples told Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. This was serious. There is no other comment upon it. We know not what the apostle said or did, further than this, that the apostle certainly went up to Jerusalem all the same. "When we had accomplished these days, we departed and went our way." Then we have the beautiful scene of the wives and the children. This has its value. There is a marked absence of allusion to children in the Acts of the Apostles, where much is said among men and saints and servants of God. But we do hear of them in that which is confessedly suitable. Here they are brought forward, but not as a superstitious church ere long did, among other things, to receive a portion from the table of the Lord: things were soon to change if not to arrive at that pass yet; but we do see them in the expression of the love that filled all, and the desire to reap to the very last moment the blessing of having an apostle in their midst. In short, the children were there no less in token of respectful love to him who was going, but also set in the attitude to receive whatever blessing the Lord might be pleased to bestow upon them. "And they all brought us on our way with wives and children," it is said, "till we were out of the city, and we kneeled down and prayed, and, when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship, and they returned home again."

Another means of letting us into the ways of God



among His people is found at Cæsarea. "We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven." We cannot well have forgotten his labours in earlier days at Samaria, and round about. But we are told here what we had not learnt then, that "the same man had four daughters." As unmarried, they were remaining in their father's house; and they prophesied. There is no reason why a woman should not have this or most other gifts as much as a man. I do not say the same kind of gift always. Surely God is wise and gives suited gifts whether to men or women, or, it may be, I was going to say, to children. The Lord is sovereign and knows how, as putting all who now believe in the body of Christ, so also to give them a work suitable to the purposes of His own grace. Certainly He did clothe these four daughters of Philip with a very special spiritual power. They had one of the highest characters of spiritual gift—they prophesied. And if they were invested with this power, certainly it was not to be put under a bushel but to be exercised: the only question is how.

Now scripture, if we be but subject, is quite explicit as to this. In the first place, prophecy stands confessedly in the highest rank of teaching, but it is teaching. Next, the apostle is himself the person who tells us that he does not suffer a woman to teach. This is clearly decisive; if we bow to the apostle as inspired to give us God's mind, we ought to know that it is not the place of a Christian woman to teach. He is speaking on this topic, not in 1 Cor. xi., but in chap. xiv. He is drawing the line between men and women in 1 Timothy ii. The latter epistle forbids the women as

a class to teach. The other and still closer word in the former epistle, commands them to be silent in the assembly. At Corinth, apparently, there was some difficulty as to godly order and the right relations of men and women, because the Corinthians, being a people of speculative habits, instead of believing, reasoned about things. It was the tendency of the Greek mind to question everything. They could not understand that, if God had given a woman as good a gift as a man, she was not equally to use it. We can all feel their difficulty. Such reasoners are not wanting now. The fault of it all was, and is, that God is left out. His will was not in the thought of the Corinthians. There was no waiting on the Lord to ascertain what was His mind. Clearly, if He has called the church into being, it cannot but be made for His own glory. He has His own mind and will about the church, and He has therefore spread out in His word how all the gifts of His grace are to be exercised.

Now the passages in 1 Cor. xiv. and in 1 Tim. ii. appear to me to be perfectly plain as to the relative place of the woman, whatever may be her gift. This may be said to decide only as to one sphere—the assembly—where the woman, according to scripture, is precluded from the exercise of her gift. I may say further, that in those days it did not occur to them that women would go forth publicly to preach the word. Bad as the state of things was in early days, they seem to me to have looked for a greater sense of modesty on the part of women. There is not the slightest doubt that many females with the best intentions have thus preached, as they do still. They, or their friends, defend

their course by appeals to the blessing of God on the one hand, and on the other to the crying need of perishing sinners everywhere. But nothing can be more certain than that scripture (and this is the standard) leaves them without the slightest warrant from the Lord for their line of conduct. Public preaching of the gospel on the part of women is never contemplated in scripture. It was bad enough for the Corinthians to think that they might speak among the faithful. It might have seemed that there women had the shelter of godly men ; that there they were not offensively putting themselves forward before all sorts of people in the world, as must be the case in evangelising. Among the godly they may have imagined a veil, so to speak, drawn over them more or less. But in modern times the end is supposed to justify the means. Gross as the Corinthians were, I must confess that to my mind the plans of our own day seem even more grievous, and with less excuse for them.

However this may be, we see here that the daughters of Philip did prophesy. No doubt it was in their father's house, as already intimated : otherwise the word of God would thus be set one part against another.

While they tarried there, a certain prophet came down from Judæa, who repeats the warning to the apostle. Binding his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle he declares, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." And thus it was accomplished to the letter. Nevertheless, spite of the tears of the saints, spite of the warning of this prophet, as of others before, Paul, with mind made up, answers, "What mean

ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

After all the apostle goes accordingly, and in Jerusalem the brethren receive him gladly. "And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present." It is evident from this picture that all ecclesiastically was in due order at Jerusalem. An apostle was there who had an apparently high place of local dignity. Besides there were the ordinary overseers whom the Holy Ghost had set as guides and leaders in the assembly (that is, the local charge of elders). "And when Paul had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." They owned the way in which the Lord had been glorified. At the same time their word to him is, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands" (the true meaning is tens of thousands, myriads, which may probably give some a larger thought than is familiar of the vast and rapid spread of the gospel at that time among that nation) "of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law; and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." This was a mistake. Such was not the course of the apostle.

What Paul really taught was the impropriety of putting Gentiles under the law: he did not interfere with the Jews at this time. Later a distinct and peremptory message came from the Holy Ghost; but the process of the Lord with them was gradual—His method with

His ancient people I deem of importance for us to learn and imitate. It is perfectly true that it was in the mind of God in due time to bring out fully the deliverance of both Jew and Gentile from the law ; but this was not done all at once, at least as regards the Jew. What the apostle set himself decidedly against was the effort to bring the Gentiles under law ; and this was precisely what Pharisaic brethren were zealous for. Whether Judaizing Christians or the Gentiles themselves took up the law, the apostle did most resolutely reject and condemn the fatal error. But as regarded the Jews themselves there was the truest forbearance, flowing from, not characteristic largeness of heart only, but tender consideration for scrupulous consciences. If God had not yet sent out the final word that told them the old covenant was ready to vanish away, how could he who so closely followed His ways be hasty ? The early days were really a time of transition, where Christ was ministered first to Jew and then to Gentile. The Gentile, never having been under law, was far more simple than the Jew in appreciating the liberty of the gospel. The Jew was tolerated in his prejudices until the closing message came from God, warning them of the danger of apostasy from the gospel through their adhesion to the law.

Having dwelt on this in sketching the epistle to the Hebrews, there is the less reason to say more about it now. But that epistle was to the Hebrew believers the last trumpet which summoned them to renounce all connection with the old system. Up to that time there had been a gradual transition, the gap widening, the difference more pronounced, but still every tie was not



broken till this the final call. Such a way strikes me as worthy of our God—a way which to our precipitate minds might seem somewhat difficult, because we have been mostly trained as Gentiles. Since we have entered into the truth of God more perfectly, we have seen the enormous mischief of bringing in the law and mixing it up with the gospel.

Let us remember then that, whilst the Holy Ghost always maintained liberty for the Gentile, there was unquestionably a time of waiting on the Jew. Even the apostle Paul was no exception to patience with their prejudices. As to the twelve, they seem to have feebly enough entered into this liberty from the law. Doubtless Paul, as being apostle of the Gentiles, called from heaven by the risen Jesus, and witness of sovereign grace, apprehended it after a different sort and richer measure; but we shall find that even he could warmly sympathise to a great extent with the feelings of a Jew. He is the one to whom, under God, we are indebted for knowing anything about Christianity in its full form and real strength; yet, for all that, it is quite evident that he had, if not Jewish prejudice, certainly the warmest Jewish attachments; and, in point of fact, it was the strength of his affection to the ancient people of God that brought him into the trouble recorded in these concluding chapters of this book, the Acts of the Apostles.

This, we must remember, to a certain extent, may be viewed as an answer to the love found in our blessed Lord Himself; but then there were striking differences. In our Lord, love for Israel was, as all else, perfect: there was not, nor could be, the faintest admixture of a blemish.



We know well the bare hint of such a thought would be repulsive to our faith and our love for His person. To the Christian it is impossible to conceive it for an instant. At the same time, we know His love for that people was felt and expressed up to the last. It was His persistent love which brought Him into the circumstances of utter rejection when God's time was come, and He suffered all the consequence of their hatred (though infinitely more also for sin in atonement, which was His alone). Now the apostle knew what it was to love Israel and suffer for that love. Not only among the Gentiles, but among the saints, the more he loved the less he was loved. This was true; but, if in general true there, emphatically was it to be verified among the Jews. Thus stands the wonderful fact in the history of the apostle Paul: the very man who brought out the church distinctly, and showed its heavenly character as none other approached; the very man that proved the absolute abolition of the old ties and relations, swallowing up all in Christ exalted to the right hand of God:—he is the man whose heart retained the strongest attachment of love to the ancient people of God. And I have not the smallest doubt that God gives us in this case a grave but gracious warning of its danger. Were it an apostle, were it the greatest of the apostles, still Paul was not Christ, and what in Christ could be and was absolute perfection, in Paul was not. Yet Paul was a man who puts all that have been since that day into the shade.

If I may express my feelings here, let me say that I felt nothing a greater trial to my own spirit than touching on this very theme. I could not point out

any one thing I shrink from more than having the appearance of reflecting on such a servant of Christ. Yet God has written the history of all this, and He has written it surely not for sentiment and silence, but for utterance and common profit. He has written it, no doubt, that we should feel our own great shortcomings, and that we should beware of our spirit in setting up to condemn such an one as the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Still, I repeat, the Holy Ghost has recorded here His own warnings on the one side, and on the other the refusal of the apostle to act on them, if I may venture so to say, though it were through fulness of tender love, and an ever-burning affection for his brethren after the flesh. Alas! when we think of our faults; when we reflect how little they spring from anything that is lovely; when we recollect how much they are mixed with worldliness, and impatience, and pride, and vanity, and self; when we observe that he was so deeply chastened, and met with such a distressing stop to the worldwide work which God had given him, in what a light do our faults appear! He had a pressure of trial such as few men ever knew beside himself; and, what might embitter it to him, all this the natural effect of slighting the admonitions of the Spirit of God by yielding to his undying love for a people out of whom, after all, he had been divinely separated to the work the Lord had given him to do. God having given us the account, whatever may be one's own feelings, can it be doubted that we are bound to read, and by grace to seek to understand? Yea, not this only, but may we apply it for the present blessing of

our souls, and for our progress in the path of Christ here below, whatever it may be. We may have the smallest possible sphere; but, after all, a saint is a saint, and very dear to God, who magnifies Himself in the least of those that are His.

It is assuredly for our profit and to God's own glory that the Holy Ghost has written this remarkable appendix to the history—the onward history—of the Acts of the Apostles. Here we have a check which brings in new things, the fruit of persisting in going up to Jerusalem spite of the Spirit's testimony against it. The more blessed the man, the more serious the miss of firm footing. There is one step outside what the Spirit enjoined, whatever may be the mingling of that which is beautiful and lovely; at the same time, it was not the full height, so to speak, of the guidance of the Spirit of God. This exposed the apostle to something more, as it always does; and, indeed, so much the more, because it was such an one as Paul. The same principle is plain in David's life. The lack of energy, which might have been comparatively a little hurt to another, became the gravest snare to David; and, found out of the path of the Lord, he soon slips into the meshes of the devil. Not that I mean anything in the least degree tantamount in the apostle Paul; far from it; for, indeed, in this case the apostle was mercifully preserved from anything that gave the smallest activity to the corruption of nature. It was simply a defect, as it appears to me, of watching against his own love for Israel, and thus setting aside, consequently, the warnings that the Spirit gave. The tears and appeals seem to have rather stimulated and strengthened his desire,

and accordingly this exposed him to what was a snare, not immoral but religious, through listening to others below his own measure. He took the advice of James.

“What is it, therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee. We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads”—what a position for the apostle to find himself in!—“and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing.” Without pretending that there was nothing in the previous line of Paul tending to this (compare chapter xviii. 18), it is evident that the object was to give the appearance that he was a very good Jew indeed. Was this warrantable, or the whole truth? Was he not a somewhat ambiguous Jew? I believe that, as we have seen, there was an undisguised respect for what once had the sanction of God. And here was just the difference in his case from our blessed Lord’s perfect ways. Up to the cross, we all know, the legal economy or first covenant had the sanction of God; after the cross, in principle it was judged. The apostle surely had weighed and appraised it all; he did not require any man to show him the truth. At the same time there was no small mingling of love for the people; and we know well how it may intercept that singleness of eye which is the safeguard of every Christian man.

The apostle then listens to his brethen about a matter in which he was incomparably more competent to form a sound judgment than any of them. Accordingly he suffers the consequence. He is found purifying himself

along with the men who had a vow. He enters the temple, "to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. And when the seven days were almost ended"—which it is well known had to do with the Nazarite vow—"the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place; and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place." The next verse shows us why. It was a mistake; nevertheless it was enough to rouse the feelings of all Israel. "All the city was moved, and the people ran together," and the issue was a frightful tumult, and the apostle was in danger of being killed by their violent hands, when the chief captain comes and rescues him. This paves the way for the remarkable address which the apostle delivers in the Hebrew tongue, given in the next chapter.

The mention of the Hebrew tongue appears to confirm the true key to the difference between this account of the apostle's conversion and others. It is not precisely in this book as in the gospels, where a different way of presenting the same fact or discourse of our Lord Jesus obtains, according to the character of the design in hand; yet is it the same principle at bottom. Even in the same book a difference of design may be traced. There may be observed this in the three accounts in which Paul's conversion is given: first, the historical account; secondly, Paul's own statement to the Jews; and, thirdly, Paul's to the Jews and Gentiles as to the



Roman governor and king Agrippa. This is the true reason of the difference there is in the manner in which facts are presented. We need not enter minutely into detail.

On examination you will find what is said to be correct, that here as is evident he adopts a language which was for the very purpose of arresting the attention in appealing to the affections of the Jew; he speaks in their familiar tongue, and accordingly gives an account of his conversion in such a way as he considered conciliatory to the feelings of the Jews. To these there was one thing which was unpardonable; but this was the very glory of his apostleship, the direct object for which God raised him up. Thus, with the most gracious of intentions, and with the warmest love towards his countrymen after the flesh, the apostle gives an account of his conversion and the miraculous circumstances that attended it, of his meeting with Ananias, a devout man according to the law, which he takes particular pains to state there, and of the trance into which he afterwards fell at Jerusalem in the temple whilst praying. But he tells them out that which he must easily have known (and so much the more because of his accurate understanding of the feelings of the Jews) would rouse them to the uttermost: in short, he lets them know that the Lord called him and sent him to the Gentiles.

It was quite enough. The moment the sound of "Gentiles" reached their ears, all their feelings of Jewish pride took fire, and at once they cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! It is not fit that he should live." As they cried and cast off



their clothes to throw dust into the air, the chiliarch commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging. There he put himself in the wrong; for Paul was not only a Jew but a citizen of Rome; and he was so by a better title than the commandant who thus ordered him to be bound. The apostle quietly states the fact. I dare not judge him, though there may be some Christians who would: he was clearly entitled to remind those that were the guardians of the law of their own transgression. He uses no means further, but merely tells them how things stood.

It appears to me that it is a morbid squeamishness rather than true spiritual wisdom that would cavil at such an act on the part of the apostle. Every one knows that it is easy to be a martyr in theory, and that those who are martyrs in theory are seldom so in practice. Here was one destined to torture, and really one of the most blessed witnesses of the Lord all through. Faith enables one to see things clearly. Should the guardians of law break the law? Faith never teaches one to court danger and difficulty, but to walk the path of Christ in peace and thankfulness. The Lord has not called His servants to desert it. I dare say some of us may have been struck with the fact that the Lord told them when they were persecuted in one city to flee to another. Assuredly this is not courting martyrdom, but the very reverse; and if the Lord Himself gave such a word to His servants in Judæa and to His disciples (as is well known), it appears to me that it is at least hazardous without grave spiritual ground to face a danger so decided of condemning

the guiltless who are entitled to our reverence. Here we have no sign of anything said by the Holy Ghost in the form of warning; and therefore, observe, it is not in the least degree a setting aside what is clearly laid down elsewhere. We have seen the Holy Ghost admonishing the apostle, when carried far in ardent love, and we can easily see that He had a sovereign title, both to guide and to correct—even if it were an apostle.

Nothing of the kind appears here. It was a fact which the Roman officer had overlooked illegally, and the apostle was entitled to state the fact. It was in no way a going to law. Need it be said that such a recourse to the powers that be would have little become a follower and servant of Jesus? It was in no way using such means as man would have employed; it was the simplest possible statement of a circumstance serious in the eye of the law, and it had its effect. "And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chiliarch, saying, Take heed what thou doest; for this man is a Roman." The chiliarch enquires accordingly. You must remember that to say you were a Roman, if you were not, was a capital offence against the government, which of course they never failed to visit with the severest punishment. To claim it untruly was too dangerous to be often attempted, as it exposed a man to the imminent risk of death. The officials of the Roman empire were rarely disposed therefore to question such a claim, especially where it was made by a man who, on the face of it,

was such a character as the apostle, little as he might be known to any of them.

So "straightway," it is said, "they departed from him which should have examined him, and the chiliarch also was afraid after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him." However, man strives to preserve his dignity after his own fashion. "On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands," (that is to say, he leaves him still a prisoner which he had no right to do,) "and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them." The apostle seeks no further redress, and was as far as possible from the desire or thought of punishing the man for the mistake he had made. For this evidently would have been a departure from grace: but the occasion helps to give a little insight into this wonderful man of God. For when the high priest Ananias commanded those that stood by to smite him that said he had lived in all good conscience, Paul turns quickly upon him with the words "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall" (and so He did); "for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people."

This is a fine instance of the most simple, and at the same time admirable, way in which grace recovers, even if there be a momentary slip of haste mingling with it. There can be no doubt at all that the high priest had

acted in a way entirely contrary to the law. There was therefore an indisputable right to rebuke him. At the same time I suppose that his decided character, and his keen sense of the glaring injustice, did betray itself in his utterance. Further, it is an instance of what is found often elsewhere in Scripture. God may be with a deed which on one side of it may have haste mingling with it, but on the other real truth and righteousness. What was done here by the high priest was glaringly contrary to the law of which he was the professed administrator. Nor certainly did God permit these solemn words to fall to the ground without bearing fruit. Paul at once, however, corrects himself, and owns that had he known him to be the high priest, he would not have spoken so; that is to say, whatever might be the character of the man, Paul was not one to lower the office. He would leave it to God to judge that which was unworthy of it.

There is another thing that claims our notice. Is there not a certain peculiarity discernible in a measure in the apostle now? First of all there was haste of spirit. Is there as firm treading as before in the path where the power of the Spirit of God rested on him? Do we not find an adroitness, may I venture to say, though wishing in no way to utter a word too much, as is easily done? But still is there not a cleverness in the way in which the apostle, when he perceived that one part of the council were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, cried out, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees;\* of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question"?

\* The plural form is recommended to us by the most ancient

This does not seem according to the simple and full activity of the Spirit of God that we have seen in the apostle when he was away from Jerusalem. He had gone where he had been divinely warned not to go; and it matters not who it is, if it were even the greatest of the apostles, is there not a sensible difference when there is the smallest divergence from the peaceful guidance of the Holy Ghost? And if this is true of him, what shall we say of ourselves? Do not allow your lips to utter strong things about the apostle Paul; but let your own consciences, and let mine, take heed to our own ways, and above all beware of this—that we be not found slighting one word that comes to us from the Holy Ghost. Let us weigh and cherish every expression of God's mind. In this case the apostle Paul could not doubt it. It was not doubt; but he strengthened himself now that the time was come to suffer. He had made up his mind for the worst that man might or could do. Was it all that was there? In truth there was more than this; but I think the comparative lack of calm, the exposure to haste, and the other features that appear in this remarkable history, are meant to be signs to our souls of the real truth of the case as it now stood.

The consequence was soon apparent on this occasion. The diversion produced was no doubt what men would call politic; that is, the apostle designed to divide and conquer. He made good use of the one party that had

uncials, some good cursives, the Vulgate and the Syriac; the singular prevails in the great majority of copies and versions. Being more natural or customary, though far less energetic, we can understand copyists falling into it.



whatever there was of zeal and orthodoxy. There is not the smallest pandering to the Sadducees, which would have been far from the Spirit of God. Now I am very far from saying or implying any unworthy ways; but I do mean that there was a kind of availing himself of the difference that reigned between these that held to the word of God with, at any rate, an outward religious respect, and those that despised it; and this is a danger that no man is free from, particularly in circumstances of danger. The apostle yielded to it then. He stated the fact that the hope and resurrection of the dead were in question; but still the question arises, What was his motive for putting it so? What does the Spirit of God bring out before us here? Was it simply the truth? Was it only Christ? I doubt so.

It seems clear that the discerning eye of the apostle saw the horrible state of the high priest and his party,—that whatever might be the honour of the office, yet, in the defiled and defiling hands that now held it, it was only used for their own worst purposes against the truth and grace of God. Accordingly he availed himself of the strong feeling of the sounder part of the nation, and thus gained what might have seemed unexpected adherents among the Pharisees. It did not give him after all the advantage. To the believer is not this always the result? I doubt very much the weight of such a gain. Have we not learnt that the true gain is Christ? and that to take our side unqualifiedly with the Lord, by God's grace to shut our eyes to all consequences, and our ears to all censure, and just go on holding to that which we know is acceptable in His eyes and for



His own glory,—is not this the only true path of service, as it certainly is the precursor of victory? In this case it would be a victory unmixedly for the Master. Such an idea as one's own victory ought not to be in a Christian man's mind. Let our desires be simply for the Lord—for His grace and truth, for His own work and glory in the church. His name is ill-served by making use even of the most reputable of His adversaries. Those zealous for the law, one cannot but know, are opposed to the gospel,—the Pharisee no less than the Sadducee. The apostle presents to the multitude "the hope and resurrection of the dead." He does not commit himself to speaking about Jesus; he does not say a word of the gospel. Had he brought in either, all would have come to nothing: the Pharisee would have resented the word just as much as the Sadducee. Leaving out what was adverse to his purpose, he puts forward that which he knew would set one part of his enemies against the other.

Yet here was vouchsafed no small comfort from the Lord to His servant. "And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." What a proof of what the Lord is, even in (yea, because of) those very circumstances when the apostle's heart might have been exceedingly cast down! He had persisted in going up to Jerusalem, and brought himself

into what certainly looks like a false position, and as a fact exposed him to a number of disasters and painful oppositions. The Lord at this very time, when things looked gloomiest, appeared to His servant, and comforted him. Instead of a word of reproach, on the contrary it is all that could bid him good cheer.

How good the Lord is! How perfect in His ways! He knows how to deal with a mistake whenever there is one, while He righteously deals with it so much the more in one who ought not to have made it, a mistake in his case being a thousand times more serious than in another. Nevertheless, the Lord has nothing but comfort to administer at such a time. "Be of good cheer, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness of me in Rome." He was not going to be killed. This was just before the conspiracy appeared. What could man do? Why should he be afraid then? The Lord meant him to go to Rome: his heart's desire was to go there. That is what his heart was set upon next to Jerusalem; and he had his way in going to Jerusalem; and now the Lord was about to take him to Rome. To Rome he was going, but he was to visit it bearing the marks of having been up to Jerusalem. He was going to Rome a prisoner; bringing the message surely of the grace of God, but not without the experience of what it cost to have yielded to his love for the ancient people of God. He was going to Rome with a deeper sense of what his true calling was. His allotted work lay among the Gentiles—pre-eminently and especially among the uncircumcision. Why did he not cleave simply and solely to his calling?

Nor were the foes of the gospel scrupulous, spite of

their boasted attachment to the law of God. A conspiracy was forming among the unhappy Jews, and the Lord in His providence brings it to light by one that was kinsman of the apostle, to whose heart the ties of flesh and blood appealed with some strength, if there were no higher motive. No doubt he must have been a Jew to have been in the secrets of that portion of the nation which was bent upon the destruction of the apostle. He divulges the secret, first to Paul, subsequently to the chiliarch. Accordingly Lysias (for this was his name) gets ready a detachment of soldiers, and horsemen, and spearmen, during the night, and sends Paul to Felix the governor with a letter. Little did the Roman think that his letter was to be read by you and me; little did he know that there was an eye that looked him through and through as he wrote. That the false and the true should be proclaimed on the housetops he never counted on. "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them; then came I with the troop and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman." He understood nothing of the sort; he was merely deceiving his superior, seeking in fact to make capital out of that which was error and fault; for, as we have seen, he began with a positive infraction of Roman law. He had bound, and this for the purpose of scourging, one no less a citizen than himself. He was guilty of claiming credit and zeal, where he had been both remiss and hasty. Oh, how little does the world think that the secrets of the most private letter,—the counsels of the cabinet,—the movements of kings, of governors, and

ministers of state, of military chiefs and their men, no matter who or what, are all before One who sees all and forgets nothing.

Paul, however, is rescued; and now comes another scene. Ananias, the high priest, descends with the leaders to try their fortune before the governor with the captive. On this occasion they hire an orator to plead for them. If he begins with the grossest flattery and pomposity of speech, the apostle answers with as strikingly admirable and quiet dignity, exactly suited to the circumstances.

Here the apostle, then, when the governor beckoned him to speak, explains how utterly false were all the charges of this hired rhetorician. He loved his nation too well instead of being in anywise their troubler, as he had been represented. "As thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogue, nor in the city." There was therefore no such case as Tertullus had set forth: "We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes; who also hath gone about to profane the temple." He had only been a few days in Jerusalem, and was there worshipping, not seeking to trouble anybody. "Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope

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towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Then he frankly states what had brought him up on this occasion. "I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings." He really did love them. "Whereupon," he says, "certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult; who ought to have been here before thee, and object what wrong they had against me." But the witnesses were not found. In point of fact, there was nothing tangible to allege against him. It was merely the outburst of priestly hatred and popular fury, followed by a conspiracy formed to murder; and when this failed, the effort was to bring about a judicial condemnation. Who could fail to see the mere will and malice of man? It had no other origin or character.

"When Felix heard these things, he adjourned them, saying, When Lysias the chiliarch shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty." His wise experienced eye at once saw how things were: there was not the slightest ground for the charges against the apostle. Hence the unusual order not of liberty only, but that none of his acquaintance were to be forbidden to come or to minister to him. Nay, more than this: "When Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ." But there was no compromise: he heard what he did not expect. It was not the resurrection now; it was an appeal to conscience morally, or, as it is said here, "He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judg-



ment to come." All has its season, and this was a word exactly suited to the man and the woman to whom Paul preached. It was well timed. Any one who is at all acquainted with the history of this personage—for he is an historical character—knows that he was peculiarly guilty, and that these words of the apostle were directly levelled at, and a condemnation therefore of, his moral delinquency.

Felix trembles, accordingly, and talks about hearing him at another time; but that convenient time never came. "He hoped also that money should have been given him." How truly, therefore, and how seasonably, had Paul "reasoned to him of righteousness!" "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him." Besides, you see the character of the man in what follows. "After two years Porcius Festus came in Felix's room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." There was no justice to be got out of this unjust judge. It was not that he wanted sense, or wisdom, or judgment. He had all these, and so much the worse for him; but he was willing to sacrifice everything for his own ends. He had been foiled in his desire for money; and now to please those Jews whom he heartily despised—willing to do something that would ingratiate himself with them without costing him anything—he leaves Paul bound.

Festus in due time appears to our view in the next chapter (xxv.) He had the same desire. He was no better than his predecessor. Festus proposes in a singular way that Paul should go up to Jerusalem. This



was an unheard of thing for a Roman governor—the chief representative of the empire—to send one who had been brought before him back to Jerusalem to be judged by the Jews. Paul at once takes his stand on the well-known principle of the Roman empire that ought to have guided Festus. He says, “I stand at Cæsar’s judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. But if I be an offender, and have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if there be none of these things whereof they accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar.” This is clearly a matter of spiritual judgment. Paul had now committed himself to this course, as later he actually went before Cæsar. It was irrevocable. There was no human possibility of change now. He had uttered the word; before Cæsar he must go. Nevertheless, a short time after this we find Agrippa comes down, and the Roman governor, knowing well the active mind of the king, tells him the story of Paul. He felt his own weakness in having to do with such a case, and he knew the interest of Agrippa. Agrippa accordingly tells the governor that he would like to hear the man himself.

On the next day, “when Agrippa therefore was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chiliarchs and principal men of the city, at Festus’ commandment Paul was brought forth.” And here we find a remarkably fine contrast with all the glitter and pomp of the court. The king himself was a most capable man, but destitute of moral purpose. His wife, however she

might be favoured naturally, was alas! a woman of no character whatever. Both of them were under the most painful cloud of suspicion even in the minds of the heathen themselves, not to speak of the Jews. These are the persons who, with the Roman governor, sit in judgment upon the apostle. And then comes forth the prisoner bound with chains. But oh what a chasm separated them from him! What a difference in the eyes of God! What a sight it was to Him to behold these judges dealing with such a man without one shred to cover them of what was of Himself—nay, with that which was most shameful and debasing. In all the splendour of earth's rank and dignity they sat to hear the poor but rich prisoner of the Lord. And Agrippa (chap. xxvi.) said to him, "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee." If we find the full peace and blessedness of this honoured man of God, what the Lord wrought, and the mighty power of His grace, we see the most dignified yet lowly courtesy towards those who listened, Agrippa especially. "Because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently."

He expounds therefore all his history, how he had been trained from his youth in the strictest sect among the Jews, and again mentions how he was judged for the hope of the promise made of God to "our" fathers. Thus he reasons on the resurrection: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you if God raises the dead?" He at once brings in this which every

Pharisee acknowledged, and which was the main test of orthodoxy among the Jews. This is applied to the history of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, all turned on it. If it was true that God had raised Him from the dead, what was the position of the Jews, and what the glory of Jesus? All turned therefore on the resurrection.

Then he points out the facts of his own conversion. It was not favourable circumstances that had thrown him in the way of the gospel; it was the very reverse of attachment to the Christians or of any lukewarmness toward the law. All his prepossessions were for Israel, all his prejudices against the gospel. Nevertheless while he had carried this to the uttermost, while with the authority of the chief priests he had sought to persecute them to death, the grace of God surmounted all either of religious ties or religious hatred in the heart of Paul. "When I went to Damascus," he says, "with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun."

And not more surely was the heavenly light which streamed upon the apostle above all nature's light, than the grace which God showed that day completely eclipsed all that was of man in his heart and previous history. All disappeared before the all-overcoming strength of the goodness of God in Christ. "And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against goads. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." The

work was done. I say not that there was all the peace and blessedness he was afterwards to enjoy, but there was effected then the entrance of that spiritual light of Christ that dealt with his conscience in all its depths. At once, down to the very roots of his moral being, all was stirred up, and the good seed, the seed of everlasting life, was sown underneath. He is bidden to rise and stand upon his feet. "For I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee."

The word is not exactly as we have it—"delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles." It is hard here to see the propriety of that term "delivering" in our common Bibles. In this connexion it was not a question so much of a rescue as of taking him out from the people and from the Gentiles. The Lord was severing him from the Jew no less than the Gentile. It is also more than Peter speaks of in chapter xv. (taking out from the Gentiles a people for His name); which we have seen already, as it was of prime importance to insist on it at the great council of Jerusalem. It was of course still true that God is taking out a people for His name; but in the case of Saul of Tarsus the Lord speaks of taking him out from the Jew no less than the heathen. It is a separation therefore unto the new work of God from both Jew and Gentile. "Unto whom," speaking of the Gentiles, "now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith that is in me."

Nor was Paul disobedient to the heavenly vision. He bowed to the Lord. He was right, as became a man taught of God. And he "showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance." For these were the true causes of Jewish hostility.

There was no setting himself up against the law. God forbid that this should ever be an object for a Christian man! He does not call us to a negative testimony, even if legitimate; He calls us to a task far more truly of Himself. It is not against evil so much as for good that God gives us a mission. We must hold this fact always as a fixed principle. I grant you that he who is called out to a purpose that is worthy of God does judge what is evil; nay, not merely this, but judges especially what looks ever so good. Correcting evil by power is not the present purpose of God for the Christian or the church; and be assured His will is the only true directory and the only safe ground for us in everything.

Let us then always enquire, what according to scripture does God design and desire for His people now? What is His real revealed work now? To what therefore is He calling you and me? To what did He set apart the apostle then? It was certainly not the pulling down of the Jews or their legal economy. Judgment was coming on that nation soon, but as long as God forbore Paul lingered over them in patient love; and was he not quite right? But God was calling out a people from the Gentiles as well as from the Jews, and



separating him from all his antecedents, from everything that his heart was so fondly bound up in: for never was mortal man that loved Israel more than the apostle Paul did. But God took him out of all his old Jewish associations as well as the Gentiles, to whom now He sent him.

It is evident that we must be separated from human influences even of the best kind, in order to be a fit vessel for God's purposes where the need is greatest. If you would effectually help others, you must always be above the motives and ways that sway them. Impossible to deal rightly with a person if you are merely on the same level with him. This is the reason why, if a brother be overtaken in a fault, what is wanted is a truly spiritual soul to seek his restoration. A careless Christian would spoil the case; because, if he who is in fault can put his finger on something like his own shortcoming in the one who deals with him, it gives him an excuse for his own sin, and a ground for censuring his censor. Whereas, if there had been the true effect of the grace of God in him who appeals to his soul; if grace has both brought out from all that is evil and sustained in good, so that he can be accused of nothing against the Lord, I need not say how God honours it as His will and special provision for dealing with those who are involved in any fault. Here, in the apostle Paul, is the same principle, though in a far deeper and larger way. Indeed, it is but the assertion of grace—that mighty principle of God's goodness in power, working spite of evil according to all that is in His heart.

Paul, then, was taken clean out of everything, both



Jew and Gentile, but sent to the Gentile especially. And the bare sound of this it was that horrified the Jews; nor could they reconcile how one who had burning love to the Jew could at the same time be the prominent, untiring witness of grace to the Gentiles. In their legal pride they could not forgive it. The most hostile feelings broke out against Paul, coupled with the madness of envy and jealousy against the Gentiles. So he tells them, "For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having, therefore, obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying nothing else than those things which Moses and the prophets did say should come; whether Christ should suffer; whether he should be the first through resurrection of the dead to announce light," &c.

As he thus explains, the Roman governor interrupts him in the exclamation, that much learning had made him mad. Paul replies, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." There is all possible respect, it will be observed; at the same time, he could not without protest allow the ignorance of a blind heathen to put such a stigma on the truth. He appeals to one beside Festus—certainly an impartial witness as far as Christianity was concerned. "For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner." The alleged facts of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus were not unknown to Herod Agrippa. They were universally talked of by all who concerned themselves with Israel.

Suddenly he turns with a direct question: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest them. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Though I do not agree with some modern efforts as to this clause, I admit that the word "almost" hardly gives the true force. "In a little degree you are persuading me." In what spirit was this said? It seems to be a sentiment into which he was surprised, and in this sense wrung out from him. He could not deny the truth of what the apostle asserted. He would not disclaim his own prophets. He was, in point of fact, shut up in a corner as far as regarded the facts and the prophecies that spoke of them beforehand. Thus, cool a man of the world as he was, the surprise of the pointed enquiry of the apostle obliged him to acknowledge that in a little degree Paul was persuading him to be a Christian. This does not intimate, of course, that he really believed in the Lord Jesus; but the premisses of the apostle did involve the conclusion that Jewish prophecy pointed to Jesus Christ, so that Agrippa could not but own a certain impression made on his mind.

But Paul answers in a spirit truly admirable, and this not alone with wisdom, nor with loving desire only. There is another element, too, exceedingly sweet, as showing the state of the apostle at this time, and his own soul's deep present enjoyment of the Lord and of His grace. "I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both in a little and in a great degree such as I am, except these bonds." I hardly know such an answer from man's lips. We

have wonderful words of others as well as of Paul elsewhere; but to my mind, throughout the compass even of this blessed book, it would be hard to find an expression of grace and truth, with the condition of happiness which the Spirit vouchsafes, more admirably suited to the circumstances of all concerned—more perfectly reflecting what God gives by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul could not wish his bonds for any, however he might glory in them for himself. He boasted to be a prisoner of Jesus Christ; but he could not desire such fare then at least for such as he desired to be brought to the Lord. The time might come, no doubt, when those who proved good soldiers in that warfare might rejoice, even as he rejoiced, in his sufferings for Christ's sake and for his body's sake, as well as for the gospel. But this he could with all his heart wish,—that they might be, not only in some measure (even if it were only a little), but in a great degree such as he was. It is not merely that they might be Christians; still less that they might be converted; but “such as I am.”

The wish embraces both the reality or standing and the state of the Christian; yea, such enjoyment as filled Paul's own heart at the very moment when he stood in bonds before this splendid court. Did not Paul know the dark cloud that hung over Agrippa and Bernice, not to speak of others? Grace surmounts all evil, as it overcomes and forgives the worst enemies. There is not one bitter reflection, nor a denunciatory word. Grace wishes its best even for those who are bent on the pleasures of sin for a season. We know that judgment is sure and just; but grace can rise to a higher kind of justice—not that of earth or of man,

but of God, who can be just, and justify him that believes—"the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ." This was what filled his heart, and it was the full unhindered strength of God's own grace made good and seen in Christ that was now working in his own soul. It was drawn out by his delight and enjoyment of the Christ to whom he had been bearing witness, whose glory made pale all that a Roman governor or a Jewish king could boast. It was not the surprise, but the overflowing heart of one who looked right into eternity—who recalled once more the brightness of the glory of heaven, wherein he had seen Christ Himself brighter than all that glory—the source, power, and fulness of it all, and the giver of it also to those who believe. It was this that filled him then, and strengthened him to utter such an expression of divine love.

The court breaks up, Agrippa acknowledging himself that Paul might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Cæsar. This is to be noted.

The next chapter details the singularly instructive voyage of the apostle: where, instead of being a prisoner, he looks as if he was really the master of the ship; and, indeed, had his word been duly heeded in time, they would have been preserved in safety. How wonderful a thing faith is! How blessed the faithfulness that flows from faith; how completely it is the power of God in whatever position a man may be!

Here you find the apostle on his way to the Gentiles. All was clear now. He is away from that which was a charmed circle to him, where his bow did not abide in strength, but now, as before Festus and Agrippa, has

returned to his old vigour. All is found in its place : no proofs are wanted where every fact proves it.

The last chapter shows us not only the journey to Rome, but the apostle reaching it. There, too, we find how truly the power of God is with him. He is received and no small kindness shown by the inhabitants in the island of Malta. And Paul illustrates how far any word of the Lord is in vain by accomplishing one of the peculiar promises in the disputed verses at the end of Mark. This strikes the minds of these heathen, so that afterwards we find the father of the great man in the island with Paul, who prays and lays his hands upon him and heals him. "When this was done, others also which had diseases in the island came, and were healed : who also honoured us with many honours ; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary."

Arrived in Italy, they taste the comfort of brotherly love. "We found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days ; and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and Tres Tabernæ ; whom, when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage." What a joy it is for a humble brother to be the means of inspiring the apostle Paul with fresh cheer along the road of Christ ; and how we defraud ourselves as well as our brethren of so much blessing by our little faith and scanty love in identifying ourselves with the most despised and suffering for the name of the Lord ! To what a work are we not called ! What a wonderful mission is that which the Lord con-



fers upon the simplest soul that names the name of Jesus! May He wake us up to feel how blessed we are, and what a spring of blessing He is! Out of them, it is said, "shall flow rivers of living water." Here, observe, it was the apostle himself; and, though it may seem strange to some, even he could find the sweetness and the power of the ministry of love.

To Rome Paul goes, and there he dwells with a soldier that keeps him; and in due time he sees the Jews, and lays before them the gospel at full length. Alas! it was the same tale; for man is everywhere the same, but God is too. "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive."

The sentence, the long-suspended sentence, of judicial hardening was now about to fall in all its withering strength. It had been hanging over the nation ever since the days of Isaiah the prophet; for not without ground was it uttered then. Still the patience of God pursued its way, till Jesus came and was rejected, when the clouds gathered more thickly. Now not only the Holy Ghost was come, but He had testified of the risen glorified man from Jerusalem to Rome. But if He had testified, the Jews, instead of being, as they ought to have been, the first to receive God's testimony, were in point of fact the first to refuse—the most active and obstinate emissaries of unbelief and of Satan's power,—not only not entering in themselves, but forbidding



those who would. Accordingly, then and most justly fell that pall of judgment because of unbelief under which they lie to this day. But the gospel goes to the Gentiles ; and spite of all that had wrought hitherto, or might work hereafter, they were to hear, and they have heard ; and we are ourselves, thanks be to God, the witnesses of it.

## V.

### THE EPISTLE OF JAMES.

To the reader who enters on the consideration of the epistle of James from the epistles of Paul, the change is great and sudden, and by no means least of all from the epistle to the Hebrews, which, in the arrangement of the English Bible, immediately precedes James. The main object of that epistle was to consummate the breach of the old relationships of such Christians as were Jews in times past, and to lead them out definitively from all earthly connexion into their heavenly association with Christ.

It is not so when we enter from the Acts of the Apostles; as in truth it is so arranged in the great mass of ancient authorities, and some versions which follow them. These "general epistles," as they are called, are placed not after the Pauline but before them. Thus the break is by no means so marked, but on the contrary natural and easily understood; for, in point of fact, James coalesces with the state of things that we find in the churches of Judæa, and notably in the church at Jerusalem. They were zealous of the law; they went up to the temple at the hour of prayer;—not only Israelites, but even priests, a great company, we hear at one time were obedient to the faith. We have no ground what-

ever to suppose that these left off either sacrifices or the functions properly sacerdotal. This sounds strange now as men constantly look and judge out of their own present state; but it is impossible to understand the scriptures thus. You must take what the Bible gives, and thus seek to form a just judgment according to God.

It is perfectly plain from the early portion of the Acts of the Apostles, and confirmed too by the latest glimpses which the Holy Ghost gives us of the church in Jerusalem, that there was still a great and decided cleaving to that which was properly Jewish on the part of the early Christians there. They used the faith of Christ rather for conscientious, godly, thorough carrying out of their Jewish thoughts. Whatever people may say or think about it, there is no denying this. Whatever they may know to be their own proper place as Christians who never were in such a position, and, so far from being led into it, guarded from it strenuously by the Holy Ghost, there is no question that the facts which scripture presents to us regarding the church in Jerusalem are as I have endeavoured to state them.

Again, the epistle of James was written not merely to the church in Jerusalem, but to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. This prepares us for something even larger, not merely for Christian Jews, but for Israelites, for such wherever they may be—not merely in the land but out of it—"scattered abroad;" as it is said, "the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad." In short it is evident that, among inspired epistles, James's address has a special and an exceptional place. Where this has not been taken into account, there need be no

surprise that men have misunderstood the epistle of James. We all know that the great Reformer, Luther, treated this portion of the word of God with the most undeserved distrust and even contempt. But I am persuaded that no man, I will not say despises, but even attempts to dispense with, the epistle of James except to his own exceeding loss. Luther would have been none the worse, but all the stronger, for a real understanding of this writing of James. He needed it in many ways; and so do we. It is, therefore, a miserable cheat where any souls allow their own subjective thoughts to govern them in giving up this or any portion of the word of God; for all have an important place, each for its own object. Is it too much to ask that a document be judged by its express and manifest design? Surely we are not to take Paul's object in order to interpret James by. What can be conceived more contrary, I will not say to reverence for what claims to be inspired, but even to all sense and discrimination, than such a thought? And it is thus that men have stumbled and fallen over this—it is little to say—precious and profitable, and above all, practically profitable portion of the word of God.

At the same time we must read it as it is, or rather as God wrote it; and God has addressed it, beyond controversy, not merely to Christian Jews, nor even to Jews, but to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. Thus it embraces such of them as were Christians; and it gives a very true and just place to those who had the faith of the Lord Jesus. Only it is a mistake to suppose that it contemplates nobody else. People may come to it with the thought that all the epistles were

addressed to Christians, but this is simply wrong. If you bring this or any other preconception to the word of God, no wonder His word leaves you outside its divine and holy scope. For He is ever above us and infinitely wise. Our business is to gather what He has to teach us. There is no more fruitful source of error than such a course. No wonder, therefore, when persons approach scripture with preconceived thoughts, hoping to find confirmation there instead of gathering God's mind from what He has revealed,—no wonder that they find disappointment. The mischief evidently is in themselves and not in the divine word. Let us prayerfully seek to avoid the snare.

James writes then after this double manner. He says "a servant of God." Clearly there we have a broad ground which even a Jew would respect. On the other hand, to "a servant of God" he adds, "and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Here at once would spring up a divergence of feeling among them. The mass of Israelites would of course altogether repudiate such a service; but James writes of both. Observe he does not speak of himself as the brother of the Lord, although he was, and is so styled "the Lord's brother" in the epistle to the Galatians. It seems needless to explain that the James who wrote this epistle was not the son of Zebedee; for he had fallen under the violence of Herod Agrippa long before this epistle was written—at a comparatively early date. I do not doubt that the writer is the one called "James the just," and "the Lord's brother;" but with all propriety, and with a beauty that we should do well to ponder and learn from, he here avoids calling himself the Lord's brother. It was quite right that others should

so designate him ; but he calls himself "the servant," not merely "of God," but "of the Lord Jesus Christ."

He writes, as seen, to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and sends them greeting. It is not the salutation that the Epistles of Paul and the other apostles have made so familiar to us, but exactly the form of salutation that was used in the famous epistle of Acts xv. from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, who wrote to the Gentile assemblies to guard them from yielding to legalism. And as he was the person who gave the sentence, it is not without interest to see the link between what was written on that day, and what James writes here.

The object of the Spirit of God was to give a final summons by him who held a pre-eminent place in Jerusalem to the entire body of Israelites, wherever they might be. This is evident on the face of it. Nor is this an opinion, but what God says. We are so told expressly. Controversy here is, or ought to be, entirely out of the question. The apostle James it is who lets us know that such was his object in writing. Accordingly the epistle savours of this. No doubt it is peculiar, but not more so in the New Testament than Jonah is in the Old. As a whole, you are aware that the prophets addressed themselves to the people of Israel. Jonah's special mission was to Nineveh, to the most famous Gentile city of that day. Just as the Hebrew scriptures are not without this exception, so in the New Testament you have another exception. What could better convict the narrowness of man's mind, who would like to have it all thoroughly square according to his notions. As a whole, the New Testament ad-



dresses itself to the Christian body; but James does not. That is to say, in the Old Testament we have an exceptional address to the Gentiles; in the New Testament we have an exceptional address to the Jews. Is not all this quite right? One sees thoroughly, in the midst of the utmost difference otherwise, how it is the same divine mind—a mind above the contractedness of man. Let us hold this fast! We shall find it profitable in everything, as well as in the word that we are now reading.

“My brethren,” says he, “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” Thus it is at once apparent that we are on practical ground—the manifestation of godliness toward both man and God,—that here the Holy Ghost is pressing this as the very first injunction of the epistle. “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” Temptations, trials (for clearly he refers to outward trials), are in no way the dreadful ogres that unbelief makes them to be. “We are appointed thereunto,” says the apostle Paul. The Israelites no doubt found it hard, but the Spirit of God deigns here to instruct them. They were not to reckon trial a grievance. “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” The reason is that God uses it for moral purposes; He deals with the nature which opposes itself to His will. “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (or endurance). “But let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

And how is this then to be effected? Here is brought in another essential point of the epistle. It is not only a question of trials that come upon the believer when he is here below. Clearly he is in this place addressing his brethren in Christ. He does not simply look at the whole twelve tribes, but at the faithful; as we find in the beginning of the next chapter, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." So I think it is clearly here men capable of understanding what was spiritual. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God."

These are the two most important points pressed practically throughout the epistle. One is the profit of not enjoying the pleasant only, but the rough and hard that God sends for our good. Blessing now is not in ease and honour, but, contrariwise, counting joy in trial, accepting what is painful from God, certain that He never mistakes, and that all is ordered of Him for the perfect blessing of His own people. But then this leads the way, and makes one feel the need of wisdom from God in order intelligently and happily to profit by the trial; for, as we know, the blessing of all trial is "to them that are exercised thereby." In order to discern we need wisdom. This he brings in: "If any of you lack wisdom." There is thus the need of dependence on God, the spirit of habitual waiting on Him—of bowing to Him, and, in short, of obedience. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." We shall see by and by whence this flows, but we have merely now a general exhortation.

"Let him ask in faith," says he, "nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven

with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." Thus he shows that faith supposes confidence in God, and that this doubtful mind, this hesitancy about God, is in point of fact nothing but unbelief. Accordingly it is a practical denial of the very attitude you take in asking God. It is blowing hot and blowing cold ; it is appearing to ask God, when in point of fact you have no confidence in Him. Let not such a one, therefore, expect anything of the Lord.

In the next place he proceeds to show too how this works practically: "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low:"—such are the ways of God—"because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away." All that is founded on a mere temporary set of circumstances is doomed, and in no way belongs to the nature of God as revealed in truth and grace by the Son of God. Hence, therefore, God reverses the judgment of the world in all these matters,—“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low.” The reason also is given: “For as the flower of the grass” (which is mere nature) “he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.”

On the other hand, one may and should be “blessed.” Here we have the full contrast, and the reason why all this is brought in; for there is a perfect chain of connection between these verses, little as it may appear at first

sight. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation," instead of being exposed either to the instability of unbelief which we saw, or to the mere dependence on natural resources which was next proved. The man that endures temptation, that accepts it and counts it joy, blessed is he; "for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

This leads to another character of trial in inward evil, not in outward. There is a temptation which comes from the devil as truly as there is a temptation that comes from God, and is good for man. That is, there is a trial of faith, and there is a temptation of flesh.

Now it is clear that the trial of faith is as precious as it is profitable; and of this exclusively he has been speaking up to this point. Now he just turns aside to notice the other; and it is the more important to weigh it well because, as far as I know, it is the only place in scripture where it is definitely presented. Temptations elsewhere mean trials, not inward solicitations of evil; they have no bearing upon, nor connection with, the evil nature, but on the contrary are the ways in which the Lord out of His love tries those in whom He has confidence, and works for the greater blessing of those whom He has already blessed. Here, on the other hand, we find the common sense of temptation. Alas! the very fact of its being common proves where people are,—how little they have to do with God, how much in common with the world. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." Now he is touching upon another character; "for God cannot be tempted by evils,"—you

must read it as it is in the margin,—“neither tempteth he any man : but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

Thus it is not only that God is inaccessible to evil Himself, but He also never tempts to evil at any one time whatsoever. There is no such thought that enters the mind of God. He moves supremely above evil : this is the ground of the blessing of every child of God, which he will show presently, when he has finished the subject of evil that comes through man's nature. Evil is from himself ; for, as he says, “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin : and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” This is not the way in which the apostle Paul handles the matter. It is not that there is the very smallest contradiction between the two. They are perfectly harmonious ; but then it is a different way of looking at the matter ; and the reason is obvious, because what Paul treats of in Romans vii., which is the scripture I refer to, is not the conduct but the nature. Now, if you look at nature, it is plain that sin is there first, and in consequence of the sin that dwells in the nature, there are lusts as the effects of it. Here he looks at sin in the conduct, and accordingly there are evil workings within, and then the outward act of sin. Thus we see it is only, to say the least of it, a very great want of perception, and a dulness that certainly is unworthy—nay, worthy—of any person that sets up to judge the word of God—a shameful position for a creature—for a man—above all for a Christian to take. But it is here, as is the case everywhere, blindness and



ignorance in those that set one part of scripture against another.

To this, perhaps, it may be said, "Do you never find a difficulty?" To be sure, but what is the place of any one who finds a difficulty in the word of God? Wait upon God. Do not you try to settle difficulties, but put yourself in the attitude of dependence. Ask wisdom, and ask it all of God, who gives liberally and upbraids not. He will surely clear up whatever is for His own glory. There is not a man of exercised soul in this building, or any other, who has not proved the truth of what I am now saying. There is not a man who has been led in any measure to the understanding of the ways of God that has not proved the very passages, which he once found so difficult when they were not understood, to be the means of exceeding light to his soul when they were. And therefore, haste to solve difficulties is really and practically a finding fault either with God or with His word;—with His word, because it is deeper than we are; with Himself, because He does not give the babe the knowledge that would be proper to the grown man. Now it is evident that this is only foolishness. It is just the haste that hinders blessing and progress. However, nothing can be simpler than that which the apostle here describes and recommends to us, and nothing more certain.

Now we come to the other side. "Do not err, beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." We have had the evil traced to its source, which is the fallen nature of man, no doubt wrought on by Satan, but without here bringing the enemy before us. We shall find this by and by, in



chapter iv.; but here he simply looks on man's nature, and then he raises his eyes to God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." The first point therefore in the mind of the Holy Ghost here is to vindicate God at all cost, and this entirely apart from us. As evil comes from us, so all that is good comes from God; and not only is God the spring of every good—every good giving and every perfect gift being all from God—(the manner of it as well as the thing itself that is given); but, besides, there is no change in God, the creature in its best estate is nothing but change.

Thus there is a most complete vindication of God's moral glory in this verse, contrasted with man in his weakness, and ruin, and evil. But he goes farther, and asserts—and asserting, too, in the most admirable manner—the truth of the sovereign action of grace. He has claimed this for God already; but now we come to see the application to us. It is not only, therefore, that God is good, but that He is a giver, and this of nothing that is not good, and of all that is good. Stainless in His holiness, and invariable in His light, God is active in His love; and as the fruit of this energetic sovereign love He does not bless merely, sweet as it is from Him. Blessing is altogether short of that which we know now in christianity—of that which even James treats of, according to his very broad and comprehensive epistle. In the bright day that is coming God will bless the creature. In the dark day that man calls "now," God more than blesses—far more than blesses—those who believe. We are our-

selves born of Him: He communicates His nature to the believer. He does so unsought, and surely undeserved. Undeserved! Why there was nothing but evil: he had shown this immediately before. There was nothing good from man's nature as a fallen creature,—nothing *but* good from God.

Then, let it be repeated, it is not merely good we see here, but a communication of His own spiritual nature; and this He is doing by the word of truth. Scripture is the medium. The revelation of Himself by which He acts on souls is accordingly here brought before us, no less than His own sovereign will as the source of it. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." He means to bring in fulness of blessing by and by. This will be, as far as government is concerned, in the millennium; but, being only government, evil will remain to be controlled and kept down to His own glory. This could in no wise satisfy God's nature, and so scripture reveals a time coming when all will be according to God. Then will be in the fullest sense His rest,—when all question of His working and of man's responsibility will be over,—when He, entering into the result, will grant us to enter into His rest. Then shall we be not merely first-fruits of His creatures, but all in rest and glory according to the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Meanwhile we who are thus begotten, the first-fruits, have the wondrous blessing here set forth. It is not merely that we are objects of this blessing. Alas! how often a blessing has been given, and as often lost, being turned to His shame and men's corruption.

God blessed, as we know, at the very beginning—blessed everything that He had made; but there was no stability in a blessing itself. To ensure stability, all must rest on one who is God as well as man, giving us a nature according to God. In those that are fallen there must be the communication of the divine nature; and this there is in Christ, and so there always has been. It may not be always consciously known, and it was not in Old Testament times; but in order that there should be a basis of immutable blessing, and of communion in any measure between God and the creature, there must be the communication of the divine nature. Of this, accordingly, James here speaks. How it links itself with Peter, and John, and Paul, we need not stop now to enquire. We see at once that he who could despise such an epistle as this is a man—not to be despised indeed, for God would not have us despise any as He despises none Himself; but certainly—to call forth pain and sorrow that such thoughts should ever have been allowed in a soul born of God and withal a servant of Jesus Christ.

Founded, then, on this, the communication of His own nature, with its moral judgment, we have the practical exhortation:—"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear." Hearing is exactly the attitude of dependence. Now one who is the servant of God looks up to God, confides in God, and expects from God. This is the place which becomes him that is born of God. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak." Speech is apt to be the expression of our nature—of ourselves. Be slow then to speak, swift to hear. Clearly

he has God in view, and has His word before him, and that which would make His word understood. Let us, too, be "swift to hear, slow to speak."

But another thing is to be heeded. It is not only that the nature of man expresses itself in the tongue, but in the feelings of the heart; and alas! in the wrath of a fallen creature. Let us be, then, not only slow to speak, but "slow to wrath." You see at once that we have an exhortation founded on, first, the spiritual anatomy, if I may so say, of our nature, and then we are given to know the wondrous character of the new life that we have received by faith of Jesus Christ, and know to be ours, because we are "begotten by the word of truth." Next, he gives the reason; "for," says he, "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

It need scarcely be remarked that it is no question here of the righteousness of God in a doctrinal sense. James does not deal with such matters; he never takes up the question how a sinner is to be justified. Therefore, certainly, he in no way contradicts Paul, any more than in what is said of faith, or justification; indeed he does not at all treat of the same question that Paul has before him. Where two persons really take up the same matter, and then give us contrary expressions, they of course contradict each other; but if they deal with two totally different points, although they may be ever so closely connected, contradiction there is none: and such precisely is the fact as to Paul and James in the matter before us, without saying a word of the inspiration which makes it impossible. They both employ the words, "faith," "works," and "justify," but they are not settling the same question, but two different ones. We

shall find the reason of this by and by, but I the more willingly make this remark in passing, in order to help any souls who find a difficulty; because it often proves a snare, particularly to those who rest over-much on verbal analogies.

Let us look to the grace of the Lord to understand the scripture. It is the habit of many, if they find the same expression, to give it always the same meaning. This is true neither in every-day language nor in God's word. Here, for instance, we have the righteousness of God clearly in a different sense from that so familiar to us in the Pauline epistles. He is speaking of what is not pleasing to, because inconsistent with, His nature; and clearly the wrath of man is offensive to Him. It works nothing suitable to His moral nature. The passage speaks of practice, not of doctrine.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” It will be observed how far it is from being an imposed law. Particular pains are taken to guard from this prevalent idea. A Jew would have been likely to have thought of it thus; for he naturally turned to the law as the one and only standard. But, on the other hand, James is far from leaving out the use of the law: we shall find it in this very epistle. Still he is careful in this place to show that the word deals inwardly with the man,—that it is this implanted word, as he calls it, and not an external law, that is able to save the soul. The word enters by faith, or, as the apostle has it in Hebrews, is “mixed with faith in them that hear it.” “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own



selves." It is plain that we find ourselves throughout on the practical side of the manifestation by life. This is the governing thought and aim of the epistle.

"For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass." He may have ever so clear a view of himself; he sees clearly what he is like for a moment; but he as soon forgets all. "He beholdeth himself, and goeth his way." The image is faded and gone. He "straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." Oh, how true is this, and how admirably drawn to the life! It is that glimpse of conviction by the truth that comes before souls when they are forced to discern what the spring of their thoughts is, what their feelings are when the light of God flashes over and through a man; but how soon it passes away, instead of entering in and abiding within the soul! It is the power of the Spirit of God alone that can grave these things on the heart. But here the apostle is exposing the absence of an internal work where intelligence is severed from conscience, and this he illustrates, as we have seen, by the man that gets a glance in a glass, and then all is gone directly his back is turned. Whereas there is power and permanence with him who fixes his view on "the perfect law of liberty."

And here it seems seasonable to say that, so far from James being legal in the evil sense of the word, he is the inspired man who, at least as much as any other, slays legality by this very expression. For this end there is not a more precious thought nor a mightier word in all the New Testament. In its own province there is nothing better, plainer, or more striking. The



reason why people often find legality in James is because they themselves bring it. They are under that influence in their souls, and accordingly they cloud the light of James with that which was meant to veil the guilty in darkness.

What then is the law of liberty? It is the word of God which directs a man begotten by the word of truth, urging and cheering and strengthening him in the very things that the new life delights in. Consequently it has an action exactly the opposite of that exercised by the law of Moses on the Israelite. This is evident from the bare terms: "Thou shalt *not* do" this, "thou shalt *not* do" that.\* Why? Because they wanted to do what God prohibited. The desire of man as he is being after evil, the law put a veto on the indulgence of the will. It was necessarily negative, not positive, in character. The law forbade the very things to which man's own impulses and desires would have prompted him, and is the solemn means of detecting rebellious fallen nature. But this is not the law of liberty in any wise, but the law of bondage, condemnation, and death.

The law of liberty brings in the positive for those who love it—not the negation of what the will and lust of

\* If my memory serve me, a celebrated man of the day wrote an essay on liberty, in which he observes that Christians are thrown on the law of Moses in default of *positive* morality in the New Testament. Can anything be conceived more superficial than such a remark? or a more evident token of the blindness of unbelief in him who made it? But it must really be so where Christ is not known. Is it not also striking as a proof that superstition is at bottom infidel as truly as free-thinking. In this the theologian and the sceptic come to the same conclusion, and from the same source—a lack of seeing and appreciating Jesus. Life in Christ *is* positive; the law was essentially negative. The word of God expresses that life, and the Spirit gives it power; but this needs faith which all have not.

man desires, so much as the exercise of the new life—in what is according to its own nature. Thus it has been often and very aptly described as a loving parent who tells his child that he must go here or there; that is, the very places which he knows perfectly the child would be most gratified to visit. Such is the law of liberty: as if one said to the child, “Now, my child, you must go and do such or such a thing,” all the while knowing that you can confer no greater favour on the child. It has not at all the character of resisting the will of the child, but rather of directing his affections in the will of the object dearest to him. The child is regarded and led according to the love of the parent, who knows what the desire of the child is—a desire that has been in virtue of a new nature implanted by God Himself in the child. He has given him a life that loves His ways and word, that hates and revolts from evil, and is pained most of all by falling through unwatchfulness under sin, if it seemed ever so little. The law of liberty therefore consists not so much in a restraint on gratifying the old man, as in guiding and guarding the new; for the heart’s delight is in what is good and holy and true; and the word of our God on the one hand exercises us in cleaving to that which is the joy of the Christian’s heart, and strengthens us in our detestation of all that we know to be offensive to the Lord.

Such is the law of liberty. Accordingly “whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (or rather “doing”). There is, however, the need of attending to the other side of the picture: “If any man

seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

Then the chapter closes with giving us a sample of what pure and undefiled religion is, but chiefly as we observe in a practical way—the main object and never lost sight of. There is, first, the "visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction,"—persons from whom one could gather nothing flattering to the flesh, or in any way calculated to minister to self; there is, on the other hand, the keeping one's self unspotted from the world. How often one hears people in the habit of quoting from this verse for what they call practice, who dwell on the first part to the exclusion of the last. How comes it that the last clause is forgotten? Is it not precisely what those who quote would find the greatest difficulty in honestly proving that they value? Let us then endeavour to profit by the warning, and above all by the precious lesson in the word of our God.

In all that we have had the question naturally arises, Wherein lies the special propriety of such exhortations, or why are they addressed to the twelve tribes? Surely we may ask this; for those who value the word of God are not precluded from enquiring what the object is. Rather are we encouraged to ask why it was according to the wisdom of God that such words as these should be presented to Israel, and especially to such of the twelve tribes as had the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. James enters upon this expressly in the next chapter.

"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor

man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou here, or sit here under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised them." Here, it would seem, we begin to learn more definitely the reason. We can see the need, value, and wisdom of what has been said, but we may find here the occasion of it: with Israel there was peculiar danger of taking up the doctrines of Christianity as a system. As a people who had an exceptionally religious standing, they were yet more exposed to this than the Gentiles. The Jewish mind on its own side was just as prone to make a code of Christianity as the Gentiles were to couple it with philosophy. The Greek mind might speculate and theorize about it, but the Jew would make a quasi-Talmud of it in its way. His tendency would be to reduce it merely to a number of thoughts, and thus an outward system.

At this precisely is the epistle levelled, namely, the severing faith from practice. Against this the Holy Ghost launches His solemn and searching words in the rest of the chapter. This brings in the allusion to the law: "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." Then follows a grave and searching consideration for those who talk about the law,—“for whosoever shall keep the whole

law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." From this use of these two things, that is, the royal law which thus goes forth towards one's neighbour, and again the law in general, he turns to take up the law of liberty which has been explained before. "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy ; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

This introduces then the famous passage which has been the perplexity of so many minds : "What should it profit, my brethren, though a man may say that he hath faith, and have not works ? Can faith save ?" It is evident that it cannot. A faith that is unproductive has no living link with God. What is the good of a faith that consists in mere assent to so many dogmas, and thus proves its human source ? The faith that is given us of God saves, not that which is the fruit of man's nature. We have seen this already, and so therefore the grand principle of the first chapter leads as simply as possible into the application of it in the second. Here all is exemplified in a plain but striking way. "If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled ; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body ; what doth it profit ?" Evidently nothing. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works : show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God ;



thou doest well : the devils also believe and tremble." If there is any difference, the advantage is really on the side of those misleaders of poor ruined men. At least they do feel ; and so far there is a greater effect produced than on these reasoning Jews. "But wilt thou know, O vain man?" says he. It is not all that the Corinthian was vain in his speculations, but the Jew not less, who thus spoke and acted. "Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead."

Yet the remarkable feature we have also to weigh here is that when works are thus introduced, attention is directed to what would be perfectly valueless if they were not the result of faith,—nay, worse than valueless, positively evil, and entailing the severest punishment. For if we merely look at Abraham, or at Rahab, apart from God, apart from faith,—if we regard their ways here cited as a question of human good works—who in the world would ever so style that which Abraham or Rahab did? It is perfectly plain that according to man Abraham would have been in danger of losing his liberty, if not his head, for intent to kill Isaac; and unquestionably, judged by her country's law, the conduct of Rahab must have exposed her to the worst punishment of the worst political crime. But this would be judging their actions apart from God, because of whose will they were done, and apart from faith, which alone gave these works their life and character. Otherwise Abraham in man's eye was a father ready to murder his own son : what could be worse than this? In short, if we regard his work apart from faith, it is perhaps the darkest evil conceivable. And what was Rahab's act but treason against her country and her



king? Was she not willing, so to speak, to hand over the possession of the city in which she had been born and bred to those who were going to raze it to the foundations?

The moment we bring into view God and His will and His purposes, it is needless to say that these two memorable acts stand out clothed with the light of heaven. The one was the most admirable submission to God—with unqualified confidence in Himself, even when one could not see how His sure promise could stand, but sure it would. A man that did look straight up to God, swift to hear and slow to speak, was Abraham;—a man in whom the loud voice of nature was utterly silenced, that God's will and word might alone govern his soul. So, if it were his only son that came of Sarah, so much the more bound to his heart because so singularly given in the pure favour of God, yet he would give him up, and be prepared with his own hand to do the dreadful deed. Oh, if ever there was a work of faith since the world began, it was that work for which Abraham was ready—yea, did put his hand to. So on Rahab's story I need not dwell, except just to show how remarkably guided of divine wisdom was James's allusion. How truly it bears the very stamp of inspiration, and the more so because we know the apostle Paul refers to Abraham at least for a totally different purpose! But not more certainly was Paul inspired to present Abraham's faith and Abraham's act too in this closing circumstance of his life (we may say, the great and final test of his faith), not more was Paul guided in his application, than James was in that which has been just now before us.

The great point of all seems this: that there were works, but the works that James insists on are works where faith constitutes their special excellence, and indeed alone could be their justification. Is this then in any way allowing the value of works without faith? The very reverse is true. He does call for works, and is not content simply with faith, but the works he produces are works that owe all their value to faith.

Thus, therefore, the indissoluble union between faith and works never was more blessedly maintained than in the very circumstances that James thus brings before us. So far is he from shaking faith that he supposes it, and the works which he commends are stamped with it in the most definite and striking manner.

Then we come to some fresh practical exhortations. As we have found, he particularly warns against the tongue as the expression of the heart's excitement if not of malice. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Here we open with its application in another and, if possible, still more important province; that is, in the matter of speaking to public edification. We have to remember that the danger is not only in what may be breathed in private; but, adds he, "Be not many masters,"—that is, in the sense of teachers—"knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." For surely that which a man says publicly will be used to measure himself; and it is well to be prepared for it. If we ought as a rule to be slow to speak, there is no exception in setting up to teach others; for thus we certainly incur severer judgment. It is an exhortation that shows on the one hand the danger and wrong of being over ready to seize an open door through

anxiety to display one's self; on the other hand, it supposes the perfect liberty that reigned among believers. Impossible that such an exhortation could apply where there exists the régime of an exclusive ministry.

Thus evidently not only does James's doctrine set forth clearly the blessed truth of a new nature, as already shown, but his exhortation supposes just the same openness among Christians in the exercise of ministerial gift as was found, *e.g.* in 1 Cor. xiv., and in practice throughout the church of God. So far from there being any contradiction of others in the epistle of James, although there is not a little which in form is new (for the twelve tribes) both in its breadth and in its speciality, the mind of God is one. The inspiring Spirit, even in the most peculiar production of the New Testament epistles, gives us what harmonizes with every other part, and cements the whole fabric of divine truth.

There is a moral reason added: "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." He does not, I apprehend, restrict himself to public speaking, though opening with it, as we have seen. "Behold we put bits into horses' mouths." He shows that it may seem a little thing to man, but we must not excuse what is wrong because it may appear to have a little source. He proves that the least things are often those which govern other bodies incomparably larger. "Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm." This is applied to the subject in hand. "The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter" (or

wood, as it is given in the margin) "a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." In all the Bible we meet no more energetic and truthful picture of the desperate evil to which men are exposed by that little active member. "For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame." The comfort is that God can deal with it—God who gives the believer His own nature, and knows how to bring down the old nature so that there may be scope for the manifestation of what is of Himself.

Nor does James spare the gross inconsistency too often experienced. "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." This is fortified by various illustrations, and followed up by the picture of the wise man, who is proved to be such, not by famous knowledge, but practically. It is always the every-day application that is in the mind of James. It is ever the right thing, as it was exactly what was most called for then and there. Had he in this epistle launched out into the vast expanse of the truth, he would only have given an impulse to the heaping up of more dogmas. Such a course would only have aggravated the evil instead of uprooting it. Himself a wise man in his ordinary ways, there was divine wisdom given him by the Holy Ghost in thus dealing so directly with

the snares of the twelve tribes, and even of that portion which professed the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hence, if a man be wise, the question arises, how is it to be proved? Assuredly not in talking much, which usually tends to talking ill. "Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." If on the contrary there were bitter envy and strife in their hearts, how could they boast against the truth, or lie against it? How cuttingly severe, and this simply from laying bare things as they were! Yet, what an exposure! Think of people glorying in their shame! "And lie not against the truth." It was a practical incongruity and contradiction of the mind of God.

Then we are shown two kinds of wisdom,—just as with regard to temptations there were two sorts of them—one blessed from God, and a real glory to the man that endures; and the other a shame, because it springs from his own fallen nature. No otherwise is it with wisdom. "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." Its works prove its nature and its source. There is confusion in every evil way, "but the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable." Never reverse this order; it is not only that this wisdom is pure and peaceable, but it is *first* pure, *then* peaceable. It first maintains the character and glory of God, and then seeks the fruits of peace among men. But this is not all. It is gentle, and easy to be entreated, or yielding. Instead of ever giving battle for its rights supposed or real, there is clearly the yieldingness of grace about it. It is not the stubbornness of self-assertion or opinion-



ativeness. This, on the contrary, stamps the sensual aspiring wisdom of man; but what comes down from above is gentle, yielding, full of mercy and good fruits, uncontentious, and unfeigned. When a man is conscious that his wisdom is of a suspicious kind, one can understand him unwilling to have his mind or will disputed; but the truth is, that there is nothing which so much marks the superiority of grace and truth and wisdom that God gives as patience, and the absence of anxiety to push what one knows is right and true. It is an inherent and sure sign of weakness somewhere, when a man is ever urgent in pressing the value of his own words and way, or cavilling habitually at others. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated:" it is also "full of mercy and good fruits, without contention, and without hypocrisy." It is characterised by the self-judgment which delights in and displays the ways of God. "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." Thus if there is peace in the way, righteousness is alike the seed and the fruit. The seed, as ever, must produce its own proper fruit. "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." What an honour to be sons of peace in a world ever at war with God and those who are His!

Alas! we find in chapter iv. the contrary of this—wars and fightings, "whence come they?" Not from the new nature of which God is the blessed source, but from the old. "Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and



war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" I hope it will not be contended that these were persons born of God. It seems to me that what was stated at the beginning of the present discourse is an important key for interpreting expressions. On the other hand, the effect of forgetting to whom the words are addressed, and of assuming that the epistle contemplates none but such as are born of God, is that you are obliged to explain away the strength of the divine word. Receive its address in simplicity of faith, and every word of God is intelligently found to tell. You do not require to enfeeble a single phrase. James does contemplate Christians, but not Christians only. He is writing, as he says himself, to the Israelitish stock, and not merely to those of Israel that believe. Expressly he addresses the whole twelve tribes of Israel. Whether they believe or not, they are all addressed in this epistle. Consequently there is a word for those of them that were clearly not born of God, as well as for those who were.

Under this impression I read, "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" Need it be told you that this verse has been a matter of much difficulty to many minds? Although I am not at all prepared to dogmatize about its force, it appears to me a harsh expression to suppose that the spirit here described means no more than man's spirit. I do not know how a man's

spirit can with propriety be said to dwell in a man. One can understand "the spirit of a man that is in him;" as the apostle Paul, when describing the human spirit, does put it in 1 Cor. ii., but hardly the spirit that dwelleth in a man. But if here it be not the spirit of man, the only spirit elsewhere said to dwell in man (*i. e.*, the believer) is the Spirit of God. But herein is just what causes the difficulty. How, if it be the Spirit of God, can He be put in such a connexion here? Must we translate and punctuate as in the common Greek Testament and English Bible?

Hence many are of opinion (and to this I am rather disposed, though I would not venture to say more) that the verse ought to be thus divided:—"Do ye think that the scripture speaketh in vain? Does the Spirit that dwelleth in us lust unto envy?" Clearly both the word condemns and the Holy Spirit leads in a wholly different direction. (Compare Gal. v.) The natural spirit of man does lust to envy, no doubt; but the Spirit that dwells in us opposes the flesh at all points, as we know scripture does.

And this connects itself, as it seems to me, with what follows: "But he giveth more grace." That is, so far from lusting to envy, God is acting in goodness. It is grace alone that has communicated the nature of God; it is grace alone that strengthens the new nature by the gift of the Holy Ghost who dwells in us; and yet more than this, "He giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." He who realises with God what this world is, and what man's nature is, is humble before Him; as also more grace is given to such. The sense

of all around and within leads him out in self-judgment before God.

This, then, I suppose—though not venturing to speak with more decision—is the practical result. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” How much is covered by these two exhortations! One is the source of all that is good, and the other the guard against all that is evil. “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners.” Will it be contended that sinners means saints? They are utterly different. There prevails among too many evangelical persons a mischievous habit of talking about “saved sinners.” To my mind it is not only inexact but misleading and dangerous. Scripture knows no such being as a “saved sinner.” We may well rejoice over a “sinner saved” if we know the mercy of it in our souls; but if we license the phrase—a “saved sinner,” the moral effect is, that, when and though saved, he is still free to sin. Not that any one acquainted with the truth denies that a saved soul has still the flesh in him, and is liable to sin if unwatchful. Still he who is saved has a new life and the Holy Ghost, and to sin is not natural for him: he is bound to walk in the Spirit as he lives in it. Evidently, if he sin, he must go athwart his new nature and position, and the blessed deliverance which God has given him in Christ.

Thus there is often a great deal of importance even in the way in which a truth is stated. The manner of stating a truth, however well-meant, may sometimes stumble souls, through our own want of subjection to the precious truth and the wonderful wisdom of God in

His word. Instead of helping on holiness, one may on the contrary, by an unguarded word, give somewhat of a loose rein to the old nature. This no part of scripture does. It is perfectly true that, when God begins to deal with a soul, He certainly begins with him as a sinner; but He never ends there. I am not aware of any part of the word of God in which a believer, save perhaps in a transitional state, is ever referred to as a sinner. No doubt that he who was in the front rank of all the saints and servants of God, when he looked at what he was in himself glorying in the law and nature, could and did characterize himself as a chief of sinners, especially when he thought of the immeasurable riches of God's grace of which he was so favoured a communicator to souls. In this we do and must all join in our measure. At the same time it is evident that to be a saint and a sinner at the same time is simply a flat contradiction.

In short, holy scripture does not sanction such a combination, and the sooner we get rid of phrases, which deserve no better name than religious cant, the better for all parties. It would be waste of time to speak of such a thing now, if it were not of practical moment; but I am convinced that it is, and that this and other stereotyped phrases of the religious world gravely need and will not bear an examination in the light of scripture. The traditions of Protestants and Evangelicals are no better than those of Roman Catholics, any more than of Jews who were before them all. Our wisest course is to discard every unscriptural phrase which we find current and influential.

I press, then, that the word "sinners" here clearly

to my mind shows that the Spirit of God in this epistle takes in a larger range than most allow. Also it is no mean confirmation of what has been already advanced as to James. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother" is really speaking evil of God's own law and judging it.

But he presses also the necessity of dependence on God in another form in the end of our chapter. That is, we are warned against forming resolutions, plans of our future doings and the like. This too is a practical subject. We ought all to know how much we need to watch against such an ignoring of God above us, and the coming of the Lord. As he says here, "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow"—not even on the *morrow*. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away, instead of your saying, If the Lord will, and we live, we will also do this, or that. But now ye glory in your boastings: all such glorying is evil." He does not conclude, however, without another appeal to conscience. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." It is the law of liberty, and of infinite purity and power. It is not only that sin consists in doing evil, but in not doing the good that we know. May we



never forget what the new nature loves and feels to be true and holy according to Christ.

Then in chap. v. we have a solemn word for rich men, to weep and howl for their miseries that shall come upon them. Will any man argue still that this means the saints of God? Are they the persons called to weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon them? Are they told to weep and howl? "Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver are cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together"—not exactly "*for* the last days." This would be hardly intelligible. What there can be little doubt the Holy Ghost meant us to gather is, "Ye have heaped together riches *in* the last days." This aggravated the selfishness of their ways and their indifference to others. It is bad enough to heap treasure at any time; but to heap it up in the last days was to add not a little to the evil in the Lord's eyes. "Is it a time," said the indignant prophet, to his covetous and deceitful attendant, "to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?" Was it a time, when God was dealing with unwonted power and grace even for Gentiles? Was this the time for an Israelite to lie for profit and get gain by it? And so here; when the last days were proclaimed by God's word in solemn warning, the heaping up of treasure in such days as these was indeed most offensive to Him.

"Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud,



crieth : and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton ; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just." What an unexpected moral link ! The apostle shows that the spirit of heaping up riches in the last days is the same that in other circumstances slew Jesus Christ the righteous. It is not a connection that we could have anticipated, but it is just such an one as would be discerned by the Holy Ghost ever sensitive to the Lord's glory ; and so in fact it is as we may feel on reflection. It was this selfishness that came into direct personal collision with the Lord of glory, " who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." We can understand that those whose one object was their own importance, glory, and ease in this world, necessarily felt that such an one was a living witness against them, and convicted them of flagrant opposition to the grace of God, who taught by Jesus in word and deed that it is more blessed to give than to receive. For this doctrine and practice the Pharisees were quite unprepared. (See Luke xvi.) Accordingly their hatred grew until it resulted in the cross of the Lord ; and hence this is one of the elements, though of course not the only one, which calls down the judgment of God ; and the Spirit of God so treats it here : " Ye have killed the just." The allusion is to the Lord, not the just in general, but the *Just One*, even Christ, " and he doth not resist you."

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. " Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the

precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

Then he calls them again so much the more to avoid a murmuring spirit against one and another, because the judge stood at the door. He exhorts them to endurance and to patience. This reappears as a final appeal. We had it at the commencement of the chapter; we have it again here that it should by all means be remembered. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

Then another snare is connected with this for avoidance: "Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation." What has the apostle in view here? The oath before a magistrate? In no wise does scripture slight that solemn obligation. The Lord Himself respected the adjuration of the high-priest; and in no passage whatever do we see a depreciatory allusion to a judicial oath in the sermon on the mount, or, in what James says here, or in any other part of the Bible, but the contrary. The Lord was addressing Jewish disciples, James writes to the twelve tribes of Israel who are in the dispersion; but what they both set their faces against was the habit of bringing in religious asseverations for the

purpose of confirming their word every day, besides the profaning of the Lord's name in matters of this life. This in point of fact weakens instead of establishing what is said ; for it is evident that whatever is uncalled for gives no strength to an assertion, but is just a fruit and proof of weakness. Where there is simple truth, nothing is needed but the quiet statement of the fact.

There were no people so prone to ordinary swearing as the Jews. Accordingly, I have not the slightest doubt that what our Lord and His servants reprobated was the introduction of an oath in common conversation ; and this, it is plain, does not apply to an oath administered by a magistrate. Indeed, it seems to me in itself sinful for a man to refuse an oath (supposing its form otherwise unobjectionable) if required to do so by proper authority. It would be to me a virtual denial of God's authority in civil government here below. I believe, therefore, that it is the bounden duty of every man to whom an oath is put, to take it in the fear of the Lord. I admit it must be put by competent authority. Therefore we are not to assume that the passage in Matthew v., or this portion of James, has the smallest reference to judicial swearing. How could one think that those who indulge in such thoughts show any real intelligence as to the word of God ? They certainly exhibit a certain care for conscientiousness. This is not in the least denied. But we have to take care that we are guided of God in this, which is important in the present day when we know that the spirit of the age is endeavouring to blot out God in all that touches man here below. The Lord was silent till adjured by the high-priest : was not His conduct thus perfectly con-

sistent with His own teaching? An oath, therefore, should not be refused when put by a magistrate. I am supposing, of course, that there is nothing in the terms of the oath that would involve false doctrine or countenance a superstition. For instance, in a Roman Catholic country there might be reference to the virgin, or angels, or saints. Such an oath I do not think that a Christian man would be at liberty to take. But I am supposing now that a person is required in the name of God to declare what he believes to be the truth in a matter of which he is a witness, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It appears to me that so far from his being at liberty to refuse this, he is on the contrary guilty, through ignorance, of no small sin in cavilling about the matter.

The rest of the chapter takes up another subject—the case of God's discipline. It is governmental. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." This does not mean expressly the inspired psalms. Persons are apt to think of the psalms of David whenever there is the introduction of the word. Doubtless old habits and associations lead to this; but there is no ground for it in the Bible. No more is meant here than that, being happy, he is to give vent to his joy in the praise of the Lord. It is nothing more. "Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." This we know was an old custom. It was used even by those who were clothed with miraculous power. When the apostles were sent forth of our Lord, they were directed by Him to anoint the sick with oil. (Mark vi.) And so

here the elders were to act in the same remarkable style. Nor do I deny that there are answers to prayer of a very striking kind. I do not call these answers miraculous powers, because the true power of this kind is that exercised by a person raised up of the Lord for the purpose, and who knows that he can count upon it in the case where He pleases to show it; whereas in an answer to prayer there is a trial and exercise of faith about it, just as with those who were praying for Peter when he was in prison. There was no miracle in their part of the business, as far as they were concerned. There was a remarkably direct intervention of God, but it was in no way connected with any gift of miracles committed to the people who were praying. "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." Here it is a question of God's judgment. The person is chastened in sickness for some evil; it is now judged; grace intervenes, and God heals.

Then comes the general spirit of confession. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed." It is the true love that interests itself, not only in that which is good, but even in what is, alas! the fruit of unjudged evil. But there is a careful abstinence from urging confession to the elders, I cannot doubt, in the far-seeing wisdom of God, who loves souls and hates superstition. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Elias is cited in support of this. Finally we have, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death,

and shall hide a multitude of sins." It is doubtless put in a general form. At the same time it only confirms, as it appears to me, what has already been shown to be the comprehensive character of the epistle.

In the next lecture we shall enter, if the Lord will, on what belongs more to the ordinary train of our Christian associations.



## VI.

### THE EPISTLES OF PETER.

THE epistles of Peter are addressed to the elect Jews of his day, believing of course on the Lord Jesus, and scattered throughout a considerable portion of Asia Minor. The apostle takes particular care to instruct them in the bearing of many of the types that were contained in the Levitical ritual with which they were familiar. But while he contrasts the Christian position with their former Jewish one, in order to strengthen them as to their place and calling now in and by Christ, he takes care also to maintain fully whatever common truth there is between the Christian and the saints of the Old Testament. For it is hardly necessary to say to any intelligent believer, that whatever may be the new privileges, and consequently fresh duties which flow from them, there are certain unchangeable moral principles to which God holds throughout all time. These were insisted on in the Old Testament, particularly in the psalms and the prophets. And the apostle guards against the wrong conclusion, that, because in certain things we stand contrasted with the Old Testament saints, there are no grounds in common.

Let it then be well borne in mind, that God holds fast that which He has laid down for all that are His as to

the moral government of God. That government may differ in character and depth; there may be at a fitting moment a far closer dealing with souls (as undoubtedly this is the case since redemption). At the same time the general principles of God are in nowise enfeebled by Christianity, but rather strengthened and cleared immensely. Take, for instance, the duty of obedience; the value of a gracious, peaceful walk here below; the degree of confidence in God. It was ever right that love should go out towards others, whether in general kindness towards all mankind, or in special affections towards the family of God. These things were always true in principle, and never can be touched while man lives on earth.

It is equally true, however, that from the beginning of his first epistle, Peter draws out the contrast of the Christian place with their old Jewish one. It is not that the Jews were not elect as a nation, but therein precisely it is where they stand in contrast with the Christian. Whatever may be found in hymns, or sermons, or theology, scripture knows no such thing as an elect church. There is the appearance of it in the last chapter of this very epistle, but this is due solely to the meddling hand of man. In chapter v. we read, "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you;" but all concede that the terms "*the church that is*" have been put in by the translators: they have no authority whatever. It was an individual and not a church that was referred to. It was probably a well known sister there; and therefore it was enough simply to allude to her. "She that was at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you." The very point of

Christianity is this, that as to election it is personal—strictly individual. This is precisely what those who contend against the truth of election always feel most: they will allow a sort of body in a general way to be elect, and then that the individuals who compose that body must be brought in, as it were, conditionally, according to their good conduct. No such idea is traceable in the word of God. God has chosen individuals. As it is said in Ephesians: He has chosen us, not the church, but ourselves individually. “The church,” as such, does not come in till the end of the first chapter. We have first individuals chosen of God before the foundation of the world.

Here too the apostle does not merely speak, nor is it ever the habit of scripture to speak, in an abstract way of election. The saints were chosen “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father;” for it was no question now of a Governor having a nation in whom He might display His wisdom, power, and righteous ways. They had been used to this and more in Judaism, but it had all passed away. The Jews had brought His government into contempt by their own rebellion against His name; and Jehovah Himself had found it morally needful to hand over His own nation into the power of their enemies. Consequently that nation as a display of His government was a thing of the past. A remnant, it is true, had been brought up from Babylon for the purpose of being tested by a new trial by the presentation of the Messiah to them; but alas! only to their responsibility, not to their faith; and if it be responsibility, whether to do the law or to believe the Messiah, it is all one as far as the result in man is concerned.

The creature is utterly ruined in every way, and with so much the speedier manifestation the more spiritual the trial.

Thus, as is known, the rejection of the Messiah was incomparably more fruitful of disastrous consequences to the Jew than even had been of old their breach of the divine law. This accordingly gave occasion for God to exercise a new kind of choice. Undoubtedly there was always a secret election of saints after the fall and long before the call of Abraham and his seed ; but now the choice of saints was to be made a manifest thing, a testimony before men, though of course not till glory come absolutely perfect. Accordingly God chooses now not merely out of men but out of the Jews. And this is a point that Peter presses on them,—a startling thought for a Jew, yet they had only to reflect in order to know how true it is : “Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” He is forming a family, and no longer governing one chosen nation. Those addressed from among the Jews were among the chosen ones, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”

But there is more than this : it was no longer a question of ordinances visibly separating those subject to them from the rest of the world. It was a real inward and not merely external setting apart ; it was through “sanctification of the Spirit.” God set them apart unto Himself by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost. We do not hear now of the *gift* of the Spirit. Sanctification of the Spirit is altogether distinct from that gift. His sanctification is the effectual work of divine grace, which first separates from the world a person,

whether Jew or Gentile, unto God. When a man for instance turns to God, when he has faith in Jesus, when he repents towards God, even though it may be faith but little developed or exercised, and although the repentance may be comparatively superficial (yet I am supposing now real faith and repentance through the action of the Holy Ghost), these are the tokens of the Spirit's sanctification.

There are those who constantly think and speak of sanctification as practical holiness, and exclusively so. It is granted that there is a sanctification in scripture which bears on practice. This is not the point here, but if possible a deeper thing; and for the simple reason, that practical holiness must be relative or a question of degree. The "sanctification of the Spirit" here spoken of is absolute. The question is not how far it is made good in the heart of the believer; for it really and equally embraces all believers. It is an effectual work of God's Spirit from the very starting-point of the career of faith. Elect of course they were in God's mind from all eternity, but they are sanctified from the first moment that the Holy Ghost opens their eyes to the light of the truth in Christ. There is an awakening of conscience by the Spirit through the word (for I am not speaking now of anything natural, of moral desires or emotions of the heart). Wherever there is a real work of God's Spirit—not merely a testimony to the conscience but an arousing of it effectually before God—the sanctification of the Spirit is made good.

If asked why this should be accepted as the meaning of the expression, I acknowledge that one is bound to give a reason for that which no doubt differs from the



view of many, and I answer, that in my judgment the just and only meaning of the word is proved from the fact that the saints are said to be "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

The order here is precise and instructive. Now practical holiness follows our being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, whereas the sanctification of the Spirit of which Peter here treats precedes it. The saints are chosen through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience. This is somewhat difficult for theology, because in general even intelligent and godly souls are much shut up in the prevalent commonplaces of men. Never should I for one blame their tenacity in adhering to the truth and duty of advancing in practical holiness, or what they call sanctification. This is both true and important in its place. The fault is in denying the other and yet more fundamental sense of sanctification here shown by Peter in its right relation to obedience. *A* truth is not *the* truth. True growth in practice confessedly is after justification; sanctification in 1 Peter i. 2 is before justification. It is very evident when a man is justified, he is under the efficacy of the blood of Christ. He is no longer waiting for the sprinkling of that precious blood, he is already sprinkled with it before God. But the sanctification of the Spirit laid down here is *in order to* the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus; and therefore unless you would destroy the grace of God, and reverse a multitude of scriptures as to justification by faith, this sanctification cannot be one's practice of day by day.



Confound the one with the other and you upset the gospel: distinguish sanctification in principle from the beginning for all from sanctification in practice in the various measures of believers, and you learn the truth of what Peter here teaches, which is forgotten for the most part in Christendom. If you say that practical holiness precedes the being brought under the blood of Jesus, I ask, How is one to become holy? Whence is the power or the growth in holiness? Certainly such is not the teaching of God's word anywhere, still less is it what the apostle Peter insists on here. There is a wider and, if possible, a deeper thought than the measure of our walk, which, after all, differs in all the children of God,—no two being exactly the same,—and all of us depending on self-judgment as well as growth in the knowledge of the Lord and of His grace. The word of God, prayer, the use that we make of the opportunities that His goodness affords us, both public and private,—all the means that teach and exercise us in the will of God no doubt contribute to this practical holiness.

But here the apostle speaks of none of these things, but only of the Spirit separating the saints to obey as Jesus obeyed, and to be sprinkled with His blood. And so we find it in fact and in Scripture. Thus, for instance, Saul of Tarsus had this sanctification of the Spirit the moment that, struck down to the earth, he received the testimony of the Lord speaking from heaven. He went through a profound work in his conscience after that. For three days and nights, as we all know, he neither ate nor drank. All this was thoroughly in season; and after it, as we are told, the blindness was taken away, and he was filled with the Holy Ghost. This is not the

sanctification of the Spirit. It was clearly the consequence of the Holy Ghost being given to him, but the *gift* of the Spirit is not the *sanctification* of the Spirit. Sanctification of the Spirit is that primary action that was experienced before Saul entered into peace with God. When a man is roused to hate his sins through God's testimony reaching him, and convicting him before God, and not in his own eyes,—when a man is ashamed of all that he has been in presence of God's grace, ever so little known and understood,—still where a real work goes on in the soul, sanctification of the Spirit is true there. Now this ought to be a great comfort even to the feeblest of God's children, not an alarm. There is not one of them who has not really sanctification of the Spirit. They may be troubled as to the question of practical holiness, but the fundamental and essential sanctification of the Spirit is that which is already true of all the children of God. I am not speaking of a particular doctrine. It is not a question of that; but of a soul quickened by the Spirit through the truth received in ever so simple and limited a manner. But it is a reality, and from that time this sanctification of the Spirit becomes a fact.

But then, to what are they sanctified of the Holy Ghost thus? Unto Christ's obedience and the sprinkling of His blood; for "*Jesus Christ*" belongs to both these clauses. This again is a difficulty to some minds. They would rather have placed the sprinkling of the blood first, and obedience next. I can understand them, but do not in the least agree with them. Indeed such difficulties serve to show where people are. The root of all is that people are occupied about themselves first,

instead of leaning on the Lord. No doubt if a person were at once to be brought into the comfort of full peace with God through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, this would suit the heart's sense of its own need. But it is not what the word of God gives us by that converted soul, to whose case I have adverted. What is it that Saul of Tarsus says as the effect of the light of God shining on his soul? "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And was not this before he knew all the comfort and blessing of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus?

The first impulse of a converted man is to do the will of God. There may be no sense of liberty yet, nor even joy in the Lord; there can be no solid peace whatever. All this will come in due time, and it may be very rapidly, even the self-same hour; but the very first thing that a soul born of God feels is the desire at all cost to do the will of God. It is exactly what filled Jesus perfectly. It was not a question of what He was to gain or what He was to avoid; but as it is written, "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God." To my mind, nothing is more wonderful in our blessed Lord here below than this devotedness to His Father, not merely now and again, but as the one motive that animated Him from the beginning to the end of His course here below. He came to do the will of God, and this not as the law proposed, in order that it might be well with Him, and He might live long in the earth; He never had such a motive though He fulfilled the law perfectly. On the contrary, He knew quite well before coming that He was not here for a long life, but to die on the cross. He was about to be a sacrifice for sin, giving Himself up

spite of suffering, not only from man, but from God. But at all cost God's will must be done; "by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The self-same principle is true in the believer, although of course it is pure grace toward him, whereas it was moral perfectness in Jesus. In our case it is all through Jesus. It is the Holy Ghost no doubt producing it. It is the instinct of that new nature,—of life in the believer, who, being born of God, has this necessary feeling of the new nature, the desire to do the will of God. In point of fact Christ is the life of the believer; and we can well understand, therefore, that the life of Christ, whether viewed in all its perfection in Him, or whether it is seen modified in ourselves, is nevertheless just the same life,—in our case hindered alas! by all sorts of circumstances, and above all by the evil of our old nature that surrounds it,—in Him, as we know, absolutely perfect and without mixture.

In this case, then, it seems to me that the order is divinely perfect, and manifestly so. Being sanctified of the Spirit, we are called to obey as Christ obeyed. It is another character and measure of responsibility. The Jew, as such, was bound to obey the law. To him it was a question of not doing what his nature prompted him to do. But this was never the case with Jesus. He in no case desired to do a single thing that was not the will of God. Now the new nature in the believer never has any other thought or feeling; only in our case there is also the old nature which may, and which alas! does struggle to have its own way. Therefore God has His own wise, holy, and gracious mode of deal-

ing with it. We shall see that this comes later on in our epistle, and therefore I need say no more upon it now.

Here we have the first great primary fact, that the Christian Jew does not belong any more to the elect nation; but is taken out of this his former position, and is elect after a wholly new sort. In this case, those actually addressed had belonged to that elect people, but now they were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. It was no after-thought, but His settled plan. It was the foreknowledge of God the Father in virtue of (ἐν) sanctification of the Spirit, and this unto the obedience of Jesus Christ (that kind of obedience), and the sprinkling of His blood. These two points are carefully to be weighed—Christian obedience, and the sprinkling of His blood. I consider them both to stand in manifest contrast with the same two elements under the law in Exodus xxiv., which appears to be in view. In that chapter we have Israel agreeing to do whatever the law demanded, and thereupon the blood of certain victims is taken and sprinkled on the people, as well as on the book that bound them.

It is a great mistake to suppose that the blood there is used as a sign of the putting away of sin. This is not by any means the only meaning of blood, even where it was sacrificially employed. The meaning in that sense I take to be this: that the people formally pledged themselves to legal obedience, and bound themselves in this solemn manner to obey. Just as the blood sprinkled was from the animals killed in view of the old covenant, so they shrank not from that dread and extreme exaction if they failed to obey the will



of God. It was an imprecation of death on themselves from God if they violated His commandments. Therefore it is observable there was the sprinkling of the book along with it. This had nothing at all to do with atonement—a supposition which only arises from people closing their eyes to other truths in the Bible, to their own great loss even in the truth they hold. We must leave room for all truth. Atonement has its own incomparable place. But certainly when the Israelites were binding themselves to obey the law, it was as far as possible from a confession of atonement. It is a total fallacy, injurious to God's glory and to our own souls, to interpret the Bible after this fashion. It only makes confusion in jumbling up law and gospel, to the detriment of both, and indeed to the destruction of all the beauty and force of truth.

In the case of the Christian all is changed. For Christ communicated a new nature which loves to obey God's will, which accordingly is given us from conversion, before (and it may be long before) a person enjoys peace. From the time that this new nature is given, the purpose of the heart is to obey. Such was, unhindered by imperfection, the obedience of Jesus.

But besides this, the gospel, instead of putting a man under blood as a threat or imprecation of death in case of failure, the awful sign of his doom before his eyes if he disobeyed, puts him under the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, which assures him of plenary forgiveness. With this he is intended to start as a Christian; he begins his career with that blessed shelter which tells him that, although he has entered on the path of Christian obedience, he is a forgiven and justified man



in the sight of God. Such is the suited and striking preface with which our apostle commences, contrasting the portion of the believer in Christ with that of the Jew, as it stands in their own sacred books, which we as well as they acknowledge to have divine authority.

Next follows the salutation, "Grace unto you, and peace," the usual Christian or apostolic style of address. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Thus he loves to bring out again confirmatorily the new relationship in which they stood to God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is not here blessing them in heavenly places in Christ. Such is not the topic of Peter; it had been given to another instrument more fitted for revealing the heavenly position of the believer. But if it is not union with Christ, if not our full place in Him before God, there is a clear statement of our hope of heaven. And this is what Peter immediately enlarges on. Speaking of God he says, "Who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven." It is not the universal inheritance of which the apostle Paul treats; so that clearly we have the distinction between his testimony and Paul's very definitely.

Bear in mind that the one is just as truly Christian as the other. There is no difference in their authority, but each has its own importance. The man that would make all his scripture to be the epistle to the Ephesians would soon find himself in want of Peter. And I am persuaded that a hardness of character, quite intolerable to men of spiritual minds, would inevitably be generated by making all our food to consist in what could be extracted from Ephesians and Colossians, the effect of which would soon become painfully sensible to others. The consequence would be that much of the exercise of spiritual affection which humbles the soul, a vast deal which renders needful the gracious present care of the Lord Jesus as advocate and priest on high, would be of necessity left out. In other words, if we think of firmness, as well as the sense of belonging to heaven,—a bright triumphant consciousness of glory, surely we must enter into and enjoy the precious truth of our union with Christ. But this is not all; we need Christ interceding for us, as well as the privilege of being in Christ; we need to have Him active in His love before our God, and not merely a condition in which we stand. Peter treats chiefly of the former, Paul of both, but chiefly of the latter. Such was the ordering of matters under God's hand for both. The epistle to the Hebrews of all the Pauline epistles is that which most approaches the testimony of Peter, and coalescing in it to a large extent. There we have not union with the Head, but "the heavenly calling;" and substantially the latter line of truth is that which we have in 1 Peter.

Nor is it only that we find here the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, but the life that grace has given us

is characterized by resurrection power. "We are begotten again," says he, "to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The blood of Jesus Christ, however precious and indispensable, does not of itself constitute a man a Christian either in intelligence or in fact of standing. It is the foundation for it; and every one who rests on the blood of Christ is surely a Christian; but I repeat that, both for position before God and intelligent perception and power of soul, we need and have much more. Supposing God only gave the believer according to his own thoughts (often meagre); supposing one believed in the power of the precious blood of Jesus ever so truly, and had nothing more than this our real portion by the Spirit, such an one, I maintain, would be a sorry Christian indeed. No doubt as far as it goes it is all-important, nor could any one be a Christian without it. Still the Christian does need the effect of the resurrection of Jesus following up the sprinkling of His blood—I do not say the resurrection without His blood, still less the glory without either. A whole Christ is given and needed. I do not believe in these glory-men, or resurrection-men either, without the blood of Jesus; but, on the other hand, as little are we in scripture limited to that most wonderful of all foundations—redemption through Christ Jesus our Lord. To restrict yourself to it would be a wrong, not so much to your own soul as to God's grace; and if there be any difference, especially to Him who suffered all things for God's glory and for our own infinite blessing.

In this case then we have the Christian by divine grace possessed of a new nature which loves to obey.

He is sprinkled with Christ's blood, which gives him confidence and boldness in faith before God, because he knows the certainty of the love that has put away his sins by blood. But, besides this, what a spring is conveyed to the soul by the sense that his life is the life of Jesus in resurrection. So, he adds, there is a similar inheritance for the saints with Christ Himself—"an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven," where He has already gone. More than this, there is full security, spite of our passing through a world filled with hatred and peril, for the Christian above all. "For you," says he, "who are *kept*;" for Christian doctrine is not, as men so often say, that of saints persevering. In this I, for one, do not believe. One sees alas! too often saints going astray, comparatively seldom persevering as the rule, if we speak of their consistent fidelity and devotedness. But there is that which never fails,—“the power of God through faith,”—by which the believer is kept to the end. This alone restores the balance; and thus we are taken out of all conceit of our own stability. We are thrown on mercy, as we ought to be; we look up in dependence on One who is incontestably above us, and withal infinitely near to us. This ought to be the spring of all our confidence,—even in God Himself, with His own power preserving us. There is given to the soul of him who thus rests on God's power keeping him a wholly different tone from that of the man who thinks of his own perseverance as a saint. Far better is it, then, to be “kept by the power of God through faith.” In this way it is not independent of our looking to Him.

But there is discipline also. God puts us to the proof; and, undoubtedly, if there be unbelief working, we must eat the bitter fruit of our own ways. It is good that we should feel that it *is* unbelief, and that unbelief can produce nothing but death. This may be in various measures, and therefore no more is meant than so far as want of faith is allowed to work. In the unbeliever, where it does work unhinderedly, the consequences are fatal and everlasting. In the believer the evil heart of unbelief is modified necessarily by the fact that, believing on Christ, he has everlasting life. But still, as far as unbelief does work, it is just so far death in effect. The saints, then, are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." And here it is well to observe, as an important fact to be recognised, that salvation in Peter's epistle looks onward to the future, where it is not otherwise qualified. Salvation is here viewed as not yet come. In the general sense of the word, salvation awaits the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It supposes that the believer is brought out of all that is natural even as to the body—that he is already changed into the likeness of Christ. "Salvation," says Peter, "ready to be revealed in the last time." This is the reason why he connects it with the appearing of Jesus Christ. It is not merely the work effected, but salvation revealed; and hence it necessarily awaits the revelation of Jesus Christ.

There is another sense of salvation, and our apostle, as we shall shortly find, does not in anywise ignore it; but then he qualifies the term. When he refers it to the present, it is the salvation of souls, not of bodies. This also is a very important point of difference for the



Christian, on which it will be desirable to speak presently. On the other hand, as here, when salvation simply and fully is meant, we are thrown on the revelation of the last time. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." Such is the path of trial through which the believer goes forward, putting to the proof the faith which God has given him:—"That the trial of your faith" (not of flesh as under the law) "being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

It is not said to be at Christ's *coming*. The trial of our faith will not be revealed then, but "at the *appearing* of Jesus." This is the reason why the appearing of Jesus is brought in here. The coming of Jesus might be misunderstood, as being a much more comprehensive term than His appearing or revelation. His coming (*παρουσία*) is that which effects the rapture and reception of the saints to Himself; and His appearing is that which subsequently displays them with Himself before the world, and therefore expresses but a part of His presence, being the special (not the generic) term. The appearing of Jesus is exclusively when the Lord will make Himself visible, and be seen by every eye. It is evident that the Lord might come and make Himself visible only to those in whom He is distinctly interested, and who are themselves personally associated with Him; and such, I have no doubt, is the truth of scripture. But then He may do more and display Himself to the world. Such is the "appearing" of



Jesus, and of this the apostle Peter speaks when the revelation of the sons of God in glory will take place. Then it is that the trial of the faith of the Christian will be made manifest in glory. Wherever the saints have shown faith or unbelief, whether hindered by the world, the flesh, or the devil, whatever the particular snare that has drawn them aside, all will be made plain then. There will be no possibility of self-love keeping up appearances longer: unbelief will cost as dear in that day as it is worthless now; but the trial of faith, where it has been genuine, will be "found unto praise and honour" then. Proved unbelief will be certainly to the praise of none, but where feeble faltering faith has been put in evidence by the trial, while surely forgiven in the grace of God, nevertheless the failure cannot but be judged as such. The flesh never counts on God for good. All unbelief therefore will be shown plainly to be of the flesh, not of the Spirit, and never excusable.

But this gives the apostle an occasion to speak of Jesus, especially as he had spoken of His appearing, and this in a way that remarkably brings out the character of Christianity. "Whom," says he, "having not seen, ye love." It is a strange sound and fact at first, but in the end precious. Who ever loved a person that he never saw? We know that in human relations it is not so. In divine things it is precisely what shows the power and special character of a Christian's faith. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith,"—not yet the body saved, but soul-salvation—"the salvation of souls." This at once gives us a

true and vivid picture of what Christianity is, of signal importance for the Jews to weigh, because they always looked forward for a visible Messiah,—the royal Son of David—the object, no doubt, of all reverence, homage, and loyalty for all Israel. But here it is altogether another order of ideas. It is a rejected Messiah who is the proper object of the Christian's love, though he never beheld Him; and who while unseen becomes so much the more simply and unmingledly the object of his faith, and withal the spring of "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

While this is in full and evident contrast with Judaism, it needs little proof that it is precisely what gives scope for the proper display of Christianity, which could not be seen in its true light if at all till Jesus left the world. Whilst the Lord was here, it is ignorance and error to call such a state of things, however blessed and needed, Christianity. Of course it was *Christ*, which, after all, was far more important in one sense than the work He wrought for bringing us to God. All on which one could look with delight and praise was concentrated in His own person. What were the disciples then? Members of His body? Who told you this? None can find it in Scripture. Up to that time membership of Christ, or to be in Christ, was not a fact, and consequently could not be testified to any soul, nor known to the most advanced believer. What Christ was to them then was all: not in the least did any suspect (for indeed it was not yet true) that any were in Him. The Lord spoke of a day when they should know it; but as yet the foundation was not even laid for it. This was done in the mighty work of the Saviour

on the cross ; and not the fact only but its results were made good when Christ, after having breathed His own risen life into them, went up to heaven and sent down the Holy Ghost that they might taste the joy and have the power of it. This gives room for all the practical working of Christianity. It was necessary to its existence that Jesus should go. There could have been no Christianity if Jesus had not come ; yet as long as He was visibly present on earth, Christianity proper could not even begin.

It was when He who died went to heaven that Christianity appeared in its full force ; and accordingly then came out faith in its finest and truest character. While He was here, there was a kind of mingled experience. It was partly sight and partly faith ; but when He went away, it was altogether faith, and nothing but faith. Such is Christianity. But then, again, as long as Christ was here, it could not be exactly hope. How could one hope for One who was here, however different His estate from what was longed for and expected ? Thus neither faith had its adequate and suited sphere, nor had hope its proper character till Jesus went away. When He left the earth, especially as the Crucified, then indeed there was room for faith ; and nothing but faith received, appreciated, and enjoyed all. And before He went away, He had left the promise of His return for them. Thus hope also could spring forth as it were to meet Him ; as, indeed, it is the work of the Holy Ghost to exercise the faith and hope He has given.

This, then, may serve to show the true nature of Christianity, which, coming in after redemption, is

founded on it, and forms in us heavenly associations and hopes while Jesus is away, and we are waiting for Him to return. Perhaps it is needless to say how the heart is tried. There is everything, as we have seen, to give not only faith and hope their full place, but also love. As we are told here, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing,"—no wonder he adds,—“ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” But none of these wonders of grace could have been, unless by redemption we receive the end of our faith meanwhile, namely, soul-salvation.

A very important development follows in the next verses. "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you." How little, it seems, the Old Testament prophets understood their own prophecies! How much we are indebted to the Spirit who now reveals a Christ already come! The prophets were constantly saying that the righteousness of God was near at hand, and His salvation to be revealed. Thence, we see, they did speak of these very things. They "prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories after these." Take Psalm xxii. or Isaiah liii., where we have the sufferings which belonged to Christ, and the glories after these. But mark, "To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to us they did minister the things which are now reported to you in virtue of the Holy Ghost sent from heaven." This is Chris-

tianity. It is very far from identifying the state and testimony of the prophets with ours now under grace and a present Spirit. He shows that first of all there was this testimony of that which was not for themselves but for us, beginning of course with the converted Jewish remnant,—these Christian Jews who believed the gospel which in principle belongs to us of the Gentiles just as much as to them.

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Christianity is come to us now; but when really known, it is not at all a mere question of prophetic testimony, even though this be of God, but there is the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The gospel sets forth present accomplishment—redemption now a finished work as far as the soul is concerned. At the same time, the day is not yet come for the fulfilment of the prophecies as a whole. This is the important difference here revealed. There are three distinct truths in these verses, as has been often remarked, and most clearly, as we have seen. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Then the prophecies will be fulfilled. Thus the Lord Jesus, being already come and about to come again, brings before us two of these stages, while the mission of the Holy Ghost for the gospel fills up the interval between them. Had there been only one coming of Christ, then the accomplishment that we have now, and the fulfilment of the prophecies that is future, would have coalesced, so far as this could have been; but two distinct comings of the Lord (one past, and the other future) have broken up the matter into these separate parts. That is, we



have had accomplishment in the past; and we look for future fulfilment of all the bright anticipations of the coming kingdom. After the one, and before the other, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven is the power of Christian blessedness, and as we know also of the church, no less than of preaching the gospel everywhere.

And when the Lord Jesus appears by and by, there will be not the gospel as it is now preached, nor the Holy Ghost as He is now sent down from heaven, but the word going forth and the Spirit poured out suitably to that day. There may be a still more diffusive action of the Holy Ghost when He is shed upon all flesh, not merely as a sample, but to an extent (I do not say depth) beyond what was accomplished on the day of Pentecost. In due time there will be the fulfilment of the prophecies to the letter. Christianity accordingly, it will be observed, comes in between these two extremes—after the first, and before the second, coming of Christ; and this is exactly what Peter shows us in this epistle. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope perfectly,” &c. Again in the 14th verse: “As children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, be ye also holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” There is an instance of what I referred to—that the essential moral principles of the Old Testament are in nowise disturbed by Christianity. And, indeed, you find this not merely in Peter but in Paul. Paul will tell you so, even after he shows that the Christian is dead to the law; and then a term is used to show that he does



not at all mean that the righteousness of the law is not fulfilled in us, but that it is. In fact, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in no one but the Christian. A man under the law never fulfils the law : the man who is under grace is the one that does, and the only one ; for the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” So Peter takes up a passage of Leviticus, and shows that it is strictly true—yea, if one can employ such an expression, more true (of course meaning by this more manifestly true) under the Christian than under the Jewish system. As all know, many things were allowed then for the hardness of the heart, which are thoroughly condemned now. That is, the holiness of the Christian is fuller and deeper than that of the Jew. Hence he can fairly take up the quotation from the law, not at all conveying that we were under law, but with an *a fortiori* force. As Christians, we are under a far more searching principle, namely, the grace of God (Rom. vi.), which assuredly ought to produce far better and more fruitful results.

It is clearly seen how he treats these Jews, and what they used to boast of. “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation ; because it is written, Be ye holy ; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father”—that is, if ye call on Him as Father—“who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear : forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers ; but with the precious blood of Christ,

as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." What can be more magnificent than this setting of the Christian on his own proper basis?

It will be observed here that there are two motives to holiness: the first is that He has called us; the next, that we call Him, and this by the sweet and near title of Father. It is no longer relationship with and recognition of a God that rules and governs. This was known in Israel, but it could in no wise draw out the affections in the same way as calling Him Father. We are told and meant to know, that as He called us by His grace, so we should call on Him as Father. It is after the pattern, not of a subject with a sovereign, but of a child's dependence on a parent. To this double motive there is added another consideration on which it all rests, and without which neither of these things could be. How is it that He has been pleased thus to call us? and how is it that we can call Him Father? The answer is this: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ." The Jews were all familiar with a ransom price that used to be paid in silver. But it did not matter whether one gave silver or gold, it was all corruptible; and to what did it come at last? The precious blood of Christ is another thing altogether; and there alone is efficacy found before God;

so also His incorruptible seed revealing Himself is planted in the heart of the saint.

They were redeemed then with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. It was no new thought. Though but newly brought out, it was in point of fact the oldest of all purposes. Did they boast about their law, the apostle can say that Christianity—the present blessed revelation of grace in Christ—was in God's mind before the foundation of the world. Therefore there could be no comparison on that score, not even for a Jew. And this was an important point; for the Jews reasoned, that because God brings out one thing to-day, He could not bring out another to-morrow. They consider that, because God is unchangeable, He has not a will of His own. Why even your dog has a will; and I am sure you have a will yourselves. And here is the wonderful infatuation of unbelief. That very system of reason that makes so much of the will of man, and is not a little proud of it, would deprive God Himself of a will, and under penalty of man's accusation of injustice forbids its exercise according to His own pleasure. But thus it is He brings out one part of His character at one time, and another part at another time. Therefore he would have them know that, as to the novelty with which they reproach Christianity, it was altogether a mistake; for the Lamb without blemish and without spot, though only lately slain, was foreordained before the foundation of the world. When he refers to Him as a "lamb without blemish and without spot," he evidently points to their types, yea, to Christ before the types, because we had that from the very beginning in the first recorded

sacrifice, long before there was a Jew, and still more before the law. To what did it all point? To "the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." It is plain that, if God foreordained it, He at the same time took care to act on it, and this is long before either Judaism or the law.

Thus there was a most thorough conviction of the folly of the Jewish argument as to Christianity being a mere novelty; but it was "manifest in these last times for you who by him do believe in God." Here it is not merely believing in the Messiah, but believing in "God that raised him up from the dead."

Now I do not believe there ever can be settled peace in a man's soul till he has confidence in God Himself, according to the truth of His raising up Christ from the dead. Simply to believe in Christ may make a man quite happy, but it never of itself gives solid unbreakable peace. What brings a man into that peace which resists all efforts from without to take it, all weakness within in giving it up, is the certainty that all is clear with *God*. It is He that raises the question of conscience in His sight, and this is so much the more dreadful, because when renewed we know better our own subtlety and His unstained essential holiness. It belongs to the condition in which man is that, being fallen, and yet having a conscience of the good that alas! he does not do, and of the evil that he does, he has a dread of God, knowing that He must bring into judgment the good that he knew but did not, and the evil that he knew and did. So guilty man cannot but quake, still by scepticism he may reason himself out of his fears, or he can find a religion that soothes and

destroys his conscience. But that man has this conscience in his natural state is most certain.

Christianity alone settles all questions. There we have not merely the blessed Saviour who in unspeakable love comes down and attracts the heart, and searches the conscience, but He settles all for us with God by redemption. Nor is it only that He comes down from God, but He goes up to God. That we receive the peace we need as Christians is mainly connected, not with His coming out from God, but with His going back to God ; as it is said here, "Who by him do believe in God that"—what ? Gave Him to shed His blood ? There can be nothing without this : impossible to have any holy and permanent blessing for the soul without it ; nevertheless this is not what is said. We have the value of Christ's blood already spoken of, but now it is added of God that He "raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory." Where ? In His own presence. Even the kingdom on earth does not suffice. According to Christian light nothing will do but ability to stand before the glory of God. And this by Christ's work is made good for us, because the very one that became responsible for our sins on the cross is in glory now. God has raised Him from the dead and given Him glory. The consequence is that all for ever is made clear and settled for those who believe in God, that our "faith and hope might be"—not "*in Christ*," though it is so, assuredly, but more than this—"in God." This is the more important, because of itself it completely dissipates a thought as common as it is grievous to the Lord, that Christ is the one in whom the love is, and that His task for the most part is to turn away the totally oppo-



site feeling that is in God Himself. Not so; for as He came out in the love of God, who none the less must by this very Christ judge every soul that lives in sin and unbelief, He would not go back to heaven until He had by His own sacrifice completely put sin away. But this was the will of God. (Psalm xl.; Heb. x.) Thus He goes in peaceful triumph into the presence of God, establishing our faith and hope in God, and not merely in Himself.

But there is another thing to be considered. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren,"—for this is the sure effect—"see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." There was the best and weightiest reason for this, because the nature thus produced in them is this holy nature that comes by grace from God Himself. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth; because all flesh is as grass, and all its glory as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Next he shows some of the privileges as well as wants of the Christian. First he is surrounded by an evil world, but, besides, he has not lost in fact something nearer that is quite as bad as what is in the world. "Laying aside," he says, "all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby to salvation." "To salvation" you will not find in your common Bibles, but it is none the



less true for all that. The apostle represents us as growing by the word to salvation (*i. e.*, the end in glory). It is not often that words are thus left out. The more usual fault of those who copied the scriptures was that they added words. They assimilated passages one to another; they thought that what was right in one case must be right in another; and thus the tendency was to blunt the fine edge of the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. But in this case they omitted. At first sight, perhaps, these words may be startling to some, that is, to such as think that the sense of "salvation" is weakened thereby. But you need never be afraid of trusting God or His word. Never fear for the honour of the scripture, never shrink from committing yourself to what God says. I have no hesitation in saying that this is in my judgment what God said, if we are to be guided by the most ancient and best authorities.\*

"If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious; to whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Two characters of priesthood are here shewn us. We have first seen one of them,— "a holy priesthood;" there is another lower down, in verse 9, where he says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood." Both flow from Christ and are in

\* In fact but one uncial (Cod. Angelicus Romanus) of the ninth century with many cursives warrants the omission; but  $\aleph$ , A, B, C, K, more than fifty cursives, and all the versions but the Arabic of the Parisian Polyglott support the words. The early quotations, Greek and Latin, save of Oecumenius, point to the same reading.

communion with Him who is now carrying on a priesthood according to the pattern of Aaron, but in His own person is a priest after the order of Melchisedec. That is, He is a royal priest just as truly as His functions are now exercised on the ground of sacrifice, interceding after the Aaronic pattern within the veil but a veil that is rent. He is now fulfilling the Levitical types in the holiest of all. On this is founded the spiritual priesthood, and in consequence we who are His draw near and offer up spiritual sacrifices. Besides that, not only is there holiness in drawing near to God, but royal dignity stamped upon the believer. This too is of the greatest importance for us all to remember and seek to realize by faith. Where is each to be proved? Before God we bow down in praise and adoration; before the world we are conscious of the glory grace has given us. We do honour to the world and shame to this our place by seeking its favours. Alas! how often and readily the Christian forgets his proper dignity. Let us then bear in mind that we are a royal priesthood "to show forth," as it is said here, "the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." But when it is a question of drawing near, let us not forget that we are a holy priesthood. We can all understand this: holiness, when one has to do with God; royalty, before the world when the temptation is to forget our heavenly honour.

"Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." Here again we have a scripture of the Old Testament applied; and this has often been, and still is to this day, exceedingly mis-

understood ; as if the persons here spoken of must be Gentiles because they are called the strangers of the dispersion. It means Jews, and none but Jews, who believe in the Lord Jesus. What he refers to is the loss of their title to be the people of God, which Israel sustained at the time of the Babylonish captivity. They then ceased to be manifestly God's people. Accordingly their land became the possession of the Gentiles ; and so it has gone on to this day. As we know, from that day to this there has never been a real recovery, but only the return of a remnant for special purposes for a season. The times of the Gentiles are still in course of accomplishment. They are not yet finished ; and they must be punctually fulfilled. Hence it is evident that, as long as the times of the Gentiles proceed, the Jews cannot regain their ancient title, nor become the real owners of Emmanuel's land. Indeed, it is too plain a fact for any one to dispute. All this time they are not a people ; they are dependent on the will of their Gentile masters. But even now grace gives the believer (here believing Jews) to enter that place ; we are now God's people. We do not wait for times and seasons. Israel must wait ; but we do not.

This is just the difference between the Christian and the Jew. The Christian does not belong to the world, and consequently is not bound by accidents of time. He has everlasting life now, and is a heavenly person even while upon the earth. This is Christianity. Thus he says to the Jews addressed that they were not a people (that is, in the days of their unbelief), but are now. So far was their believing in Christ from taking them out of the people, it is then alone that they became

a people. They "were not a people, but now are the people of God;" they "had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." It is a quotation from Hosea ii.

And this is exceedingly interesting, because if the prophet be compared, it will be seen to illustrate what has been remarked before—the difference between the present accomplishment made good in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and the future fulfilment of the prophecies. If persons take the actual application as the fulfilment of the prophecies, it in fact not only nullifies the future of scripture, but destroys the beauty and point of the present; for what the apostle intimates is, that they had obtained mercy now, though none were yet sown in the earth. These Christian Jews were not sown in the earth. The earth will be sown with the seed of God when the Jewish nation, as such, obtains mercy. They will be the greatest people on the face of the earth, and all the Gentiles shall own it. They will have everything at their command, and worthily use all for God. Not only are they to be set publicly at the head of the nations, but God himself will link His own glory from above with them as His earthly people here below, and nothing but peace, righteousness, and plenty will be found all over the earth in that day of glory. Such will be "that day," and of that day Hosea prophesies. You can easily judge whether that day is come now. It is only a theologian who finds a difficulty. His traditions wrap him up in fog.

I do not think it requires much argument to show whether under the gospel the Jews or the world

are in such a condition as the prophet describes, or whether there is anything in progress that is intended or calculated to bring about such a result. But what will not men believe, provided it be not in the Bible? I admit that what is in the Bible requires faith; and this is as it should be. It is, however, too evident that there is nothing like incredulity for swallowing anything that panders to the first man, and leaving out the glory of the Second. In the word of God, then, we find that the accomplishment of the prophecy supposes an earthly place, with visible power and glory given to the Jewish people. But the wonderful place given to the Christian is that, though we do become the people of God now, whether Jew or Gentile, and although the believing Jew does obtain mercy now, he is not sown on the earth, but called out for heaven, and, in consequence, becomes a pilgrim and stranger here below till Jesus appears. This will not be the case when the Jews shall be brought back to the land. In a certain sense they are strangers now; but it is an awful sense, because it is the fruit of judgment. They are scattered over the earth, and can find no rest for their souls, any more than their feet. This is notorious to every one—even to themselves. Least of all can the Jews be said to be sown in the land of Palestine. I do not mean that they may not acquire previously a delusive glory; nor that the antichrist by fraud will not palm himself off as the Messiah, and settle some of them in the land, according to Dan. xi. Nor do I believe that this day is far off. The hour of temptation is near.

But while fully looking for this, it is sweet to see the place of the believing Jew now as divine wisdom here



applies Hosea, *mutatis mutandis*. Although he is of the people of God, instead of getting an earthly character by Christianity, on the contrary he becomes a pilgrim and stranger. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." It is as if God had purposely put verse 11 to negative the conclusions which men have drawn from a misunderstanding of verse 10.

Then he begins his exhortations, and first of all with the personal snares of every day, with what the Christian had to contend with in himself. Next he proceeds to bring in what had to do with others. There he says, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or to governors, as to them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and praise to them that do well."

I suppose there was a danger of these Christian Jews being somewhat turbulent. Certainly the Jews of old were rarely good subjects. They were apt to rise against oppression and to fail in obedience to a superior, at least among the heathen. They were ever a rebellious people, as we know; and the Christian Jews were in danger of using their Christianity in order to justify insubjection. We can easily comprehend it. They could see how gross, dark, and dissolute these Pagan governors were; and in such circumstances one needs the distinct sense of God's will to abide in the duty of obedience. "How can we obey men that worship stocks and stones, whose very religion makes them immoral and degraded?" However this may have been, it is of all importance for the



Christian that he should be established in the place of patient submission; as we see Paul elsewhere taking especial pains to insist that the Christians in Rome should obey, even where they had to do with one of the most abandoned men that had ever governed the empire, persecuting themselves to death a short time after. Nevertheless the apostle there claims the most unqualified subjection to the powers that be. So here we find that the Christian Jews, who might have exonerated themselves from the burden laid on them by their heathen masters, are earnestly exhorted by the apostle Peter to do their bidding for the Lord's sake. I do not say that there are no limits. Obedience is always right, but not to man when he would force the dishonour of God. Nevertheless obedience abides the principle of the Christian. But the lower obedience is absorbed by the higher one when they come into collision; and this is the only seeming exception.

After this Peter not only branches out into the outward life, but takes particular note of the family and its relationships. Some of those addressed were domestics, whether or not they were slaves. The apostle Paul pressed on the Christian slave the beauty and responsibility of obedience; but Peter insists on it whether a man be a slave or not. This is founded on the very principle of Christianity itself; that is, doing good, suffering for it, and taking it patiently. I admit it requires faith; but then the Lord cannot but look for faith in Christian people. Nay, we have Christ Himself brought in to enforce and illustrate it. It is not merely the Christian who is called to this, but this is what Christ was called to. "Christ also suffered for us, leav-

ing us an example, that ye should follow his steps : who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth : who, when he was reviled, reviled not again." To be reviled was a pain to which as domestics they would be particularly exposed, as well as to suffer in all sorts of ways. What had Christ not gone through in the same path ?

"When he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously ; who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." He suffered in other ways ; in this He stands alone for us ; "that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness : by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray ; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." Since He came and showed the perfect pattern, it was less than ever the time to sanction disobedience ; it was more than ever unbecoming to shirk the path of suffering.

The exhortation is not limited to slaves. Here we find the various relations of life practically met. At any rate the most important part is noticed ; and in particular the great social bond, wives and husbands (chap. iii). Then comes the general exhortation : "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, pitiful, lowly-minded : not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing : but contrariwise blessing ; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." What a place for the Christian !—called to blessing, and to be a blessing. And this is fortified, singular to say, (but confirming what has been already remarked) by the Psalms. He had quoted the law in chap. i., the prophets in chap. ii., and now the

psalms in chap. iii. Thus all the living oracles of God are turned into use for the Christian, only you must take care that you do not abuse them or any part of them.

“For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” And then he asks, “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.”

This leads to another important point; that if we do suffer, it ought never to be for sin, and for the affecting reason that Christ has once for all suffered for sins. Let this be enough. Christ has suffered for sins; He has had there, if we may so say, a monopoly; and there let it end: why should we? He alone was competent to suffer for sin. We ought never to suffer but for His name, unless it be for righteousness, as is said here,—“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.”

Carefully observe that Peter does not say that Christ went to prison and preached to the spirits there. No such words are used, nor is this what he means. The spirits are characterised as in prison. They are waiting

there for the day of judgment. God may have judged them in this world, but this is not all. He is going to judge them in the next world. There may have been *a* judgment, but this is not *the* judgment. So he says these very spirits which are spoken of were "once disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is eight souls, were saved through water."

It is not a description of all that died in unbelief, but of a generation favoured with a special testimony and smitten by a particular stroke of judgment. The preaching was in the days of Noah. It was just before that judgment fell on them, and this because they despised the testimony of Christ through Noah. Just as the Spirit of Christ prophesied in the prophets, so the Spirit of Christ preached by Noah. There is no difficulty that I see about it. There is nothing at all in the verse that warrants a web of doctrine strange to the rest of the Bible. It is a mistake to construe it of one that knows not what took place in the lower parts of the earth. Nothing is said of preaching in prison, but to the imprisoned spirits—not when they were there. He is speaking about the people that heard Noah, and despised the word of the Lord then. It was not Noah's own spirit that preached; it was the Spirit of Christ.

It may be well to point out that the Spirit is used particularly in connection with Noah, as we find in Genesis vi.: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh." There was a term of patience assigned: "Yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." That is, the Spirit went on striving

in testimony to men all that time. Then the flood came and took them all away ; but their spirits are now kept in prison waiting for that judgment which has no end. And why does Peter notice them particularly ? For this reason,—that very few were saved then, whilst a great many perished. On reflection it will be evident that there is no instance so suitable as this for the argument in hand—so few saved and so many perishing. The unbelieving might taunt the Christians with their scanty numbers, while the great mass still remained Jews, and with the absurdity of such a conclusion to the coming of Messiah. There is no force in that argument, the Christian can reply ; for, when the flood came, only a few were saved after all, as is shown by the first book of Moses, their own indisputably inspired history. It is beyond cavil that the many perished then, and still fewer were saved than the Christian Jews at that time. Thus the passage is sufficiently plain. There is not the slightest excuse for misinterpreting the language, or for allowing anything unknown to the rest of scripture. It is a solemn warning to unbelief founded on plainly revealed facts before all eyes in this world, and not something to be understood as relating to another world.

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the request of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” This, again, is somewhat peculiarly put in our version. It is not exactly “the answer of a good conscience.” The real meaning may make the difficulty appear to be greater for a moment (as, I suppose, the truth often, if not



always, does); but when received and understood, what has such strength of appeal to the conscience? The word is a somewhat difficult one; but I believe the force is that it is what conscience wants and asks for from God. Now, when a conscience is touched by the Holy Spirit, what is it that satisfies such a conscience? Clearly nothing less than acceptance in righteousness before God; and this is precisely the position that baptism does set forth. That is to say, it is not simply the blood of Christ, which indeed is never the meaning of baptism; still less is it the life of Christ: baptism means nothing of the sort. It really is founded on the death of Christ; and therein further our due place is shown us by His resurrection. Thus he says, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us." Never do we see salvation in its real force so affirmed apart from resurrection. You may find that which meets guilt in death, but never is salvation short of or separable from the power of resurrection. Hence, when he says it saves us, he necessarily brings in resurrection. "Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh . . .)" He did not mean the mere outward act of baptism. This could save nobody; but what baptism represents does save. It declares that the Christian man has a new place and standing—not in the first Adam at all, but in the Second in the presence of God—man without sin, and accepted according to the acceptance of Christ before God. This it is that baptism sets forth; and what of course as a sign it brings one into. "Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the request of a good conscience toward God)



by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God ; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him."

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." In this chapter (iv.) we come to the divine government in dealing with nature opposing itself to the will of God. "For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." If you yield to nature, you gratify it ; but if you suffer in refusing its wishes, then "he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." It is practical ; and holiness costs suffering in this world. Suffering is the way in which power in practice is found against the flesh ; so that "he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." The time past might well suffice for the wretched gratification of self. Do men wonder at one's abstaining ? They are going to be judged. "For for this cause was the gospel preached to the dead also, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." Thus he shows that even if you look at those that are dead, there was no difference. They too, those who had been before them, had been put to the proof in this way. He is keeping up the link with saints of old by a general principle. Whatever the form, God never gives up His righteous government, though there is His grace also. Hence, if any received the gospel, they were delivered from judgment, and lived according to God in the Spirit. If they despised it, they none the less suffered the consequences.

“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” After this episode which has to do with men here, not in the unseen world, he returns to the relative duties of Christians, and exhorts them to watchfulness with sobriety, to fervent love, and also to “use hospitality one to another without grudging.” And then he takes up what is distinctly spiritual power, which should be used not in charity only but with conscience before God, and for His glory through our Lord Jesus. We saw in a similarly characteristic way in the epistle of James the connection of his moral aim with teaching. But they both suppose an open door for ministry among Christians in the Christian assembly. Why was there the mighty action of the Spirit of God producing such various gifts for profit if they did not create the responsibility to exercise them?

No Christian should think or talk about a right of ministry; for although liberty of ministry may be legitimate enough in itself, still I think it is a phrase apt to be misunderstood. It might easily be interpreted as if it meant a right for any one to speak. This I deny altogether. God has a right to use whom He pleases, according to His own sovereign will and wisdom; but the truth is, that if you have received a gift, you are not only *at liberty* but rather *bound* to use it in Christ's name. It is not a question of merely having license. Such a principle may be very well for man; but responsibility is the word for men of God, “as each man hath received the gift.” It is not merely certain men, one or

two, but "as each man," whatever the number, whether few or many.

"As each man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, [let him speak] as [the] oracles of God." According to this none ought ever to speak unless he has a thorough conviction that he is giving out God's mind and message, as suited for that time and those souls. Were this felt adequately, would it not hinder a great many from speaking? Nor is there any reason to fear that silence in such a case would inflict a real loss on the church of God. It does not seem to be of such prime importance that much need be said. The great matter is, that what is spoken should be from God. Persons ought not to speak unless they have a certainty that what they wish to say is not only true (this is not what is said) but the actual will of God for the occasion. The speaker should be God's mouthpiece for making His mind known there and then. This is to speak "*as* oracles of God." It is not merely speaking *according* to His oracles, which is the usual way in which men interpret the passage, and thence derive their license for speaking as they judge fitting without thinking of God's will. They think they have an understanding of scripture, and that they may therefore speak to profit; but it is a totally different thing if one desire only to speak as God's mouthpiece, though it is granted that one may here as elsewhere mistake and fail.

The principle, however, is sound; and may we heed it in conscience, looking to the Lord's grace in our weakness. "If any man speak, [let it be] as oracles

of God; if any man minister, [let it be] as of the ability which God giveth." Let it be observed here that ministry is distinguished from speaking. What a vast change must have passed over Christendom, seeing that now a man is chiefly thought a minister because he speaks! whereas real service of the saints is as precious in its place as any speaking can be. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth." Ministry, then, is clearly in itself a distinct thing from speaking; it is another kind of service to which he is called of God. It is granted that, even in connection with spiritual gift in the way of speaking, there is such a thing as the natural ability of the person taken into account; but this is not the gift, though it be the suited vehicle for it. We must always distinguish the ability of the man from the spiritual gift which the Lord gives; and, besides both, there is also the right use of the gift. One must exercise and give oneself up to the cultivation of that gift which God has given. There is nothing contrary to sound truth or principle in that, but indeed a very great defect in those who do not believe it; in fact, it is flying in the face of scripture. And scripture is clear and peremptory as to all these things. "He," it is said of Christ, "gave them gifts, to each man according to his several ability." There we have the gift, and this given according to the man's ability before he was converted. That is the outward framework of the gift, which latter is suited no doubt to that ability; but the gift itself is the power of the Spirit according to the grace of Christ. No ability constitutes a gift; but the

spiritual gift does not supersede natural ability, which becomes the channel of the gift, as the gift is given and works in accordance with that ability. But there is need also of present strength from God to those who look to Him. Thus He is in all things glorified through Jesus Christ, "to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever."

Next we have the trial that the saints were passing through alluded to, and the call to suffer not for righteousness merely but for Christ's sake. Finally a warning is given as to the importance of suffering according to God's will, committing meanwhile their souls in well-doing to Him as a faithful Creator. He is righteous; He is jealous of His house; but if this be serious for His own, where shall the sinner appear?

Again we have an exhortation to the elders (chap. v). Here it is a pain to be obliged once more to make a depreciatory remark on our common English version. It is indeed a forcible and, in general, a faithful version, but it not seldom fails in accuracy. The elders are told to feed or shepherd the flock of God which was among them, exercising the oversight, not by necessity, but willingly; not for base gain, but readily, &c. They have to bear in mind first that the flock is God's. If a man does not carry the sense in his soul that it is God's flock, I do not think he is fit to be an elder or in any other office of spiritual trust: he is far from the right ground for being a blessing to what, after all, is God's flock. In short, we find here too a guard which shows the meaning more clearly. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by con-



straint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over *God's* heritage."

It will be observed that "God's" is inserted in italics. Now there need be no hesitation in declaring that the phrase does not mean God's heritage at all, but another idea wholly different. The true drift is this—"Nor as lording it over your possessions." The elders are not to treat the flock as if it belonged to them. This is exactly what modern presbyters think they may and ought to do every day of their lives. It is into this very snare that unbelief has brought men in Christendom. It is the constant and notorious source of the difficulties that one has continually to contend with, because feelings are roused by this—all sorts of jealousies and wounded feelings are created by a position so false. In short, one may find here and there a truly excellent man, and, we will suppose, a number of godly people. But then they are "*his* congregation;" they *think* so, and the godly man really believes it. He thinks they are *his* congregation, and they think so too. The consequence is that when minds get disturbed, it may be, about their position, then all sorts of difficulties come in. He feels exceedingly wounded because, as he will tell you very often, "Why, it is one of the best of my people. I have lost the cream of my congregation." Accordingly he is exceedingly annoyed because one of the most spiritual of his congregation goes away, though it may be to follow God's word more faithfully; and no doubt there is a great deal of pain and feeling on the part of the member of the congregation who is leaving his minister.

Now all this is here judged and set aside as quite



wrong. The elders are exhorted and warned. There are those who guide, and it is a most proper thing. At the time of this epistle, it was in due order. Now, I need not tell you, things are in a certain measure of confusion. You may have the real substance of the truth, but you cannot have it in all official propriety at the present time. However, apart from that, on which I do not mean to enter more to-night, one thing is remarkable, that even when all was in apostolic order, and where pastors and teachers and prophets and so on were, and besides, where the elders had been fitly appointed by the apostles themselves or by apostolic men, even there and at that very time they were exhorted against the notion of considering, "This is my congregation, and that is your leader." Nothing of the sort is ever said in God's word but what excludes it.

What they were here directed to was to "feed the flock of God." I repeat, it is God's flock, not yours; and you are not to lord over it as if it were your own belongings. If it were your heritage, you would have certain rights; but the truth is that he who stands in the position of an elder has no small responsibility. Assuredly he is to shepherd the flock, and this as God's flock, not his own. Where this is duly weighed, it is wonderful what a change is produced in the mind, tone, and temper—a change both in those who tend the flock, and in those who are cared for; because then God is looked to, and there is no petty feeling of infringing the rights of man in one form or another. It is not then a question of wounding; for why should it hurt you, if I see a particular truth and must act according to it? Why should this be a cause for vexa-

tion? The truth is that the assumption of "my flock," or "yours," is the root of endless mischief. It is God's flock; and if a person is charged of the Lord to shepherd His flock, how blessed the trust!

The rest of the chapter consists of exhortations to the younger ones, and finally to all, with a prayer that "the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, when ye have suffered a while, himself shall make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be the glory and the might for the ages of the ages. Amen. By Silvanus, the faithful brother, as I suppose, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand. She that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and Marcus my son. Greet ye one another with a kiss of love. Peace be with you all in Christ Jesus."

In the second Epistle of Peter (and here I must be brief, because of the hour; and I may be brief because Jude will afford us a further consideration of it) we have the same substantial truth of God's righteous government maintained. But the apostle here supplements his first letter by bringing in its effect on the world in that coming day, and especially in its judgment of Christendom or corrupted Christianity. Written of course for the guidance of the saints, it may well serve as a warning to sinners, whether in the profane world or as to those that abuse righteousness and truth.

There is an expression in chapter i. 3 to which I particularly call your attention. "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain

unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us by glory and by virtue." It is really not to glory and virtue, but by His own glory and by virtue. This seems to me an important statement of the Holy Ghost's to understand. What serves to make it plain is this:—Adam was not "called" when in Paradise. When innocent, he was not called by God's own glory and by virtue. What Adam was bound to do was just to stay where he was. That is, he was responsible to do the will of God, or, rather, not to do what God prohibited in his case. There was a simple test of obedience. It was not a thing that Adam really needed in the smallest degree. He had everything that he wanted and much more, for God showed Himself to be one that delights in abundantly blessing when He put man in Paradise. The business of man, then, was to keep his first estate; he should have simply abode in his position. When he listened to the devil, this was a call not by God's own glory and virtue, but to do the devil's will. It was a seeking of his own independence by disobeying God's express word. Our calling is by God's own glory.

The whole principle of Christianity is just this. It takes the believer out of the place in which he naturally is, and alas! now in sin; and therefore it is spoken of as a calling. The Christian "calling" supposes that the gospel, where received, deals with the soul by the power of the Spirit of God; and that he who receives it is called out of the condition in which man is now plunged by sin, not put back again into the position of Adam, but taken into another position altogether. It is no longer a question of man on earth;

he is called by God's own glory and by virtue. It is by God's own glory, because if God saves, He calls to stand in nothing less than that glory. The declared effect of sin is, as it is said in Romans iii., that all "come short of the glory of God." By this they are now measured. Are they fit to stand in presence of the glory of God? The glory of God is the standard of judgment now for a sinner; it is no question of regaining the lost paradise or of keeping the law, even if it were possible. The blessedness of the gospel is that it calls a man not to put him in the place of the unfallen man or of a Jew on the earth, but by God's own glory; and along with this "by virtue." There is a holy restraint put on the allowance of the flesh in any respect whatever. It brings in not "virtue" as the first great point, but God's own glory, and then virtue along with this (that is, the moral courage which refuses the gratification of the old nature).

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises : that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." Such is the efficacy of the call of grace. A new nature is communicated which loves the will of God, and abhors the evil whereby Satan has inundated the world. "Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Then he shows there is no time for waiting or ease. "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue" (or the moral courage I have already described); and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love." These last two qualities are not the

same. "Love" is a great deal more and deeper than "brotherly kindness." The latter makes one's brother the prominent object; the former tests everything by God and His will and glory. Therefore you may find a Christian very full of brotherly love, but sadly at fault when the test of love comes, which feels and insists that the first of all duties is that God should have His way. "By this we know," as John said, (and who knew love better?) "that we love the children of God, if we love God, and keep His commandments."

In the next part of the chapter we have the kingdom introduced, which is really the main object of Peter's testimony in the first epistle as well as in the second. Being about to depart himself, he as it were throws open the blessed prospect of the Lord's interference to put aside evil in the world, and display His own power and goodness here below. Such is the kingdom that will be brought in at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. His coming, or presence, embraces the kingdom within its wide circumference.

But then in stating this, the utmost pains are taken to show that there is something better than the prospect of the kingdom, glorious as it is; and this is of capital importance to see clearly. Thus verse 19 opens the matter, which I must give you rather more exactly than as it stands in our version: "We have also the word of prophecy more confirmed, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed." They were quite right in holding fast the old prophetic scriptures. Even as Jews they had known those portions of the word of God, and the apostle in no way blames them for adhering to them tenaciously. So far, it was quite right. "Ye do well



that ye take heed" to them. It was needless to press attention with greater warmth; but still he commends the heed they paid to the prophetic word of the Old Testament. Yet study it either in the New Testament or in the Old Testament, one cannot but dread when prophecy becomes the all-absorbing object. It is not meant deeply to engage the affections. It may occupy the mind to the exclusion of what is better still. Its nature forbids it from adequately filling the heart that is purified by faith; nor does the apostle mean that it should ever have such a place. When he says, "Ye do well that ye take heed to it," he adds the instructive comparison, "as unto a lamp that shineth in a dark place." This is what prophecy resembles. He does not then stop, but points us to another and brighter light—"until the day dawn, and the morning-star arise in your hearts." He means that prophecy is a divinely given lamp for this dark scene. None can despise without loss the light it casts on this obscure place, the world which is going to be judged. It shows us the awful end and thereby guards us all the way through.

As a lamp for the dark, prophecy is therefore excellent; it is given of God for this purpose; and no Christian can afford to slight or overlook it as an unprofitable study, which does not claim and cannot reward his heed. They were quite right, then; but let them see to it that the heart possess a far better treasure. And what can this be? Not Christianity indeed as a whole, but the Christian hope. The Lord's coming, and all that is bound up with Him on high as the hope of the Christian and of the church, must not be lowered to a mere prophetic event. Prophecy deals with the



earth, with the Jew, with the nations, with evil here below; prophecy declares men to be so bad that the Lord must come and judge them, and then introduce His own kingdom, no longer morally and in testimony, but in power and glory. But is this all that Christ is for us? Do you confound the Christian hope with the judgment of Babylon, the overthrow of the Gentiles, the restoration of Israel? A Christian has the faith that in principle all evil has been judged long ago in the cross; that it has been absolutely and perfectly condemned, beyond whatever can be in the creature here below. His hope, therefore, rises far above the revelation of that display of power in righteousness as well as mercy which is to put aside evil, and then bless a long guilty and miserable world with peace and joy and every form of creature goodness. The Christian hope is the taking the Christian out of the world altogether to be in glory with Christ, the object of his heart. Therefore Peter says, "Until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." When does he mean by this expression? When the Christian lays hold of this hope; when he is not merely warned by prophecy, but has his heart reached and filled with the heavenly hope, the light of a better day, yea, Christ Himself the source and centre of it all.

Accordingly, "till the day dawn" does not mean till the day come—till the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings, and the wicked are trodden down like ashes under the feet. This is not at all the meaning of the phrase. It is the dawn of day in the heart; it is a hope that should be realized now because we are children of the day. Consequently we ought to have, as a

present thing, that daylight dawning, and the morning star arising in our hearts. A soul born of God might believe all that is in the prophecies—and it is well to heed it all—but this is not enough. Not the downfall of Nineveh, nor the judgment of the great whore, nor the destruction of the beast, is the Christian hope. Our hope is that we and all Christians are to be taken out of the world, and translated into heavenly glory. Consequently the light of the lamp does not suffice; we need also daylight. Good as the lamp is, its main value in an obscure place is “till daylight dawn”—not till we acquire more of its own light, but till a brighter character of light, daylight, dawn. It is not the actual arrival of the day that he means, but the light of day before itself comes: “Till daylight dawn, and the morning-star arise in your hearts.” Christ is made known in this heavenly light for the Christian. It is not Christ dealing with the world and judging the nations. This is the way in which Christ is described in prophecy. But not thus is Christ set before the Christian.

In short, the apostle means that it is well to hold fast the prophetic lamp, which he did not want to disparage in any way, provided it were kept in its proper place. It foreshows the judgment of the world, and it separates the believer, if he believes it, from the world. But this is negative. Do we not ourselves belong to another scene? It is all well then to turn our back on the world, which the prophetic lamp judged; but are we also turning our faces to the light that dawns from above? There are many Christians now that seem to be all occupied with the vast

changes either in progress or in anticipation for the earth. About them they fritter away thought and time with no worthy, positive, sanctifying object for their affections. How can one have affection for the judgment of Babylon and the beast? I am not called to anything of the sort. The lamp shows it me, and I am glad to be warned and responsible to warn others. But am I not called to have the only worthy object filling my heart? It is Christ Himself; and this not in the execution of judgment, but in the fulness of grace about to take us out of the world to heaven, and not merely to be assessors with Himself in judging the world when He appears in glory.

Therefore I do most strenuously oppose the petty efforts that have been made to sever the expression "in our hearts" from this verse. It is a sorrow to see them, and to know that any Christians could be influenced by them. Only this morning I was looking at a book in which there was a most misleading parenthesis introduced, as if the meaning were, "Ye do well to take heed in your hearts;" thus severing the connexion of "in your hearts" from "the day dawn and the day-star arise." What can one call this but abominable?

There is another way also in which I have seen the truth sought to be destroyed, by connecting "in your hearts" with "knowing this first," contrary to all analogy of Peter or any one else, and in fact without the smallest reason, but with the evident object of obliterating for the heart the value of the heavenly hope. Such dealings with the text I cannot characterise as mistakes only, but as unwarrantable meddling with the word of God. There is not the slightest foundation for either the one punc-

tuation or the other. The English version is perfectly correct in this at least.

And it may help some enquirers perhaps if I show them that Peter elsewhere thoroughly confirms this to a plain English reader. In the first epistle it is written, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." It is clear that the expression "in your hearts" is no unimportant phrase in Peter's epistles. If we do not "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts," we shall not gather much good either from prophecy or from the heavenly hope; but if we do, it is of the highest moment for us to have Christ as the morning-star arising in our hearts, and not such a knowledge of prophecy satisfying us as a godly Jew might once have possessed. Compare also "knowing this first" in 2 Peter iii. 3. There is no connexion with "in your hearts" there any more than here.

It is difficult to speak with patience of these rash ways with the word of God. I hold it to be a grievous sin indeed to warp scripture from the purpose for which God has written it. If it be said that these innovations meant only what is good, the question is whether any are at liberty without the best reasons to change the form of the text, and particularly to do so without telling you. In this very place for instance, in a book which professes to be the authorised version of the Bible, you unsuspectingly take up the book without knowing any change has been made in the punctuation, and your hope is destroyed before you know why,—that is, if you trust their form of the book, which the compilers meant you should.

There is another phrase that follows, on which it may

be well to say a word: "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." Many a soul asks, What is meant by this? Of course, the error of Catholicism is not to be thought of: the remedy against making prophecy of private interpretation is in no way ecclesiastical tradition. I am speaking now to persons uninfluenced by such thoughts, and need not expose its irrelevant absurdity. But, again, there are many Protestants like Bishop Horsley who think it means that the way to hinder prophecy from being of private interpretation is to take history to interpret prophecy. In this I do confess I see little change for the better. Whether you take the church to interpret prophecy, or look into the world to read its interpretation, it is but a sorry choice, and as far as possible either way from the sense. The meaning is, that no prophecy of scripture is of its own insulated interpretation. Limit a prophecy to the particular event that is supposed to be intended by that scripture, and you make it of private interpretation. For instance, if you so regard the prophecy of Babylon's fall in Isaiah xiii. xiv., you make this prophecy of private interpretation. How? Because you make the event to cover the prophecy, you interpret the prophecy by the event. But this is precisely what scripture prophecy is made not to be; and it is to hinder the reader from this error that the apostle writes as he does here. The truth, on the contrary, is that all prophecy has for its object the establishment of the kingdom of Christ; and if you sever the lines of prophecy from this great central point on which they all converge, you destroy the intimate connection of these prophetic lines with the centre. It



is like lopping off the branches from the tree to which they belong, or limbs from the body of which they are integral parts.

So it is with prophecy. All prophecy runs on to the kingdom of Christ, because it comes from the Holy Ghost. If it were the forecasting of men, a man might apply it to a particular event; and there it would end. It might be a sagacious conjecture or not. But supposing it to be ever so correct, after all it is only within the limits of a man's mind. But not so with prophecy of scripture. The Spirit of God is satisfied with no aims short of the kingdom of Christ, and hence therefore prophecy as a whole looks onward to that bright end. It may have had a partial accomplishment, a just application by the way, but it never stops short of His coming and "that day." For the very same reason, when Moses and Elias were put by Peter on the smallest approach to equality with the Lord Jesus on the mount, the Father set aside Moses and Elias with the words, "This is my beloved Son: hear ye him." His object is not Moses, or Elias either: it is Christ, the beloved Son of God. So the Holy Ghost in prophecy does the self-same thing. He had the same object as the Father—the glory of the Lord Jesus. Only as the Father held to the glory of His Son as such, the Holy Ghost in prophecy looks to the kingdom to be put under the Lord Jesus: and so "the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." They could not therefore have any object other than that of the Holy Ghost who inspired them; and so prophecy must be interpreted, not isolatedly,



but as forming part of the Spirit's testimony to the purpose of God in glorifying Christ.

The second chapter shows us the opposite side—Satan's instruments in defaming Christ and injuring souls—the false teachers in Christendom, just as there had been false prophets among the people of old. What an awful character is given to them, justifying the judgment that is coming upon them !

In the last chapter we have not merely false teachers, corrupt in their ways as in their doctrines, but scoffers ridiculing the coming of the Lord Jesus. What is the answer of the Holy Ghost to this? Their ground was the assumed unchangeableness of the world. Oh the folly of man when he opposes God! What a confirmation it is that at this present time philosophy is precisely coming to this! Christendom is going back to heathen conclusions as fast as possible. It does not matter whether we look at the popular physiologists, geologists, naturalists, astronomers, economists, metaphysicians, historians, or any others you like, they are in general hastening to this humiliating end; that is to say, a denial of the distinct statements of scripture and an exclusion of God from His own world. Their idea is, that a sort of cycle governs nature, ever repeating itself through the same round. It is the same at bottom as Peter denounces here—the notion that there is a perpetuity in the state of things around us.

Consequently such as believe in nature must scoff at the assertion of the Lord coming to change the face of all things. The apostle warns them to aban-

don that delusion; for after all God has intervened already. The God that caused the flood, and destroyed the world that once was, can destroy the world again. And this is precisely what the Lord is going to do. Therefore, if you tauntingly say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" I answer you, not that *He* is coming for you, but that *the day of the Lord* is coming on the world. What can scoffers have to do with the coming of the Lord for His own people? You may ask with a scoff, "Where is the promise of his coming?" But we can answer with assurance that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night—as sudden, unexpected, and unwelcome, for the judgment and destruction of the creation which is your rest and ruin. When everything has disappeared that can, and all that is to be shaken shall have been dissolved, the result will be the new heavens and new earth, "wherein dwelleth righteousness," without one scoffer more.

The believer then in the face of this is exhorted to holy conversation and godliness. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing that ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, should fall from your own steadfastness;" for there is danger of the Christian's contamination by the spirit of the world. What then is the preservative? "Grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

## VII.

### THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN.

THE Epistles of John have evidently a character altogether peculiar to themselves. Christ Himself personally is more before us than in any other of the inspired epistles. Nevertheless there is this difference between the Gospel and the Epistles of John: that his gospel necessarily treats of Christ in a direct and immediate way, and then the provision that He made, when He was about to leave the world and His disciples in it, by the Holy Ghost taking His place down here (these being the two chief subjects of the Gospel of John); in the Epistles, on the other hand, while Christ is still prominent, the main characteristic is to show Christ is in us, as well (so to speak) as Christ in Himself—that it is the self-same life, Christ personally being its full perfect expression. In order to set out this astonishing truth with all clearness, the Epistle opens directly with the Lord, and this as He was manifested in this world. The Gospel begins with Christ before all worlds. Such is not the manner in which the Holy Ghost begins here.

I am aware that some have been disposed to take “That which was from the beginning,” as if it taught

the same truth as "In the beginning was the Word." No doubt there is an allusion, but there is also a marked difference. We gain nothing by forcing scripture: we always lose somewhat. In the Gospel, where Christ Himself directly and immediately is the object, the Holy Ghost starts with revealing His divine subsistence when there was none but God: "The Word was with God," and lest there should be any question of His glory, "the Word was *God*"—not the creature. "The same was in the beginning with God." Thus He had a distinct personal existence, which had been from everlasting. No matter how far one goes back, we may still find the Word, and the Word with God: it is not said exactly with the Father, but with God. We never in scripture find the "Word" coupled with the "Father." We do find it in what is not scripture, as I shall show before we have done with considering this Epistle. In unquestionable scripture, "*the Word*" and "*God*" are correlative,—the "*Son*" and the "*Father*." Man cannot even imitate the word of God without exposing his own weakness.

The Gospel therefore, in order to assert His glory, goes back before all time. And "in the beginning"—no matter where you may ask to place the point within eternity—the Word was there. But this is not at all the object of the Epistle. It is assumed no doubt, but it is to show how truly the life is the very same. It is not *union*. Life is never confounded with union, though in the Christian closely connected. Union is by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, but life was before this, whether in Christ personally, or even in us. Christ Himself *is* our life.

Hence, when flesh had hindered and overlaid the power of the Spirit; when the world was gaining vast influence; when Satan was working with all subtlety to undermine the foundations, the Holy Ghost directs attention to Christ, in whom the life was manifested. In what the Son of God was before entering the world, there could be no instruction for us how the life is to be now displayed in us; and what God looks for,—how by the Holy Ghost He nourishes and exercises us. The weightiest instruction turns on what Christ was here, having to do with man—with Satan—above all, with His God and Father. So have we. Hence, therefore, it is not here, “He was in the beginning with God,” but “That which was from the beginning.”

This is a phrase (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) constantly used as to the manifestation of the one or thing spoken of: it matters not whether it be good or evil. We find the formula used, for instance, of Satan. There is no reference to what he was before he became the devil; there is silence as to his subsistence as an unfallen angel, but when he departed from God, he sins from the beginning. Such is his character as devil: he sinned. As for our Lord Jesus, He was manifested as man here below; but before we hear of what was manifested, John says, “That which *was* from the beginning.” He had a personal being as man here below—a divine person no doubt, but He took a real place in this world. This seems to be referred to in the expression “which was from the beginning.” Next we have the fact that others are directed towards Him—what we have “heard” about Him—what we have “seen with our eyes.” It

was not a mere phantom, but a real person in this world—hence “that which we have looked upon,” or contemplated. Even though from above, He was really an object seen; He was not a passing shadow, but a person, “which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled” (coming down as it were into the closest familiarity) “concerning the word of life.” It will be understood that all these different clauses refer to the Word of life—what was from the beginning about the Word of life: what we have heard about the Word of life: what we have seen, and so on.

“And the life was manifested.” The second verse yet makes the first plainer; for there we find His pre-existence with the Father, when the apostle has stated His manifestation (for that expression “the life was manifested” is a kind of summary of what had been laid down in the preceding verse): “The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and announce to you that eternal life, which was with the Father.” Now here we have the Son’s eternal being, so that there is no holding it back in this verse. It is supposed and treated of as a known truth; but the present object is to put forward the Lord Jesus as He was displayed in this world; for “it was manifested to us: that which we have seen and heard” (taking up the two verses) “announce we to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Thus the evident aim here is to show that there has been a manifestation—an adequate personal revelation of God the Father. The only such adequate manifestation was Christ Himself. But it was Christ Himself in this world, a man



as truly as any other, though infinitely above man, but a man who displayed what divine life is in all imaginable circumstances. He became a babe, a child, a full-grown man. He grew up subject to His parents; He entered on public life, as before He was traced in the unobtrusive privacy of His home after the flesh. He is then found confronted with the enemy, going forth in the power of the Spirit, dealing with every kind of pain and sorrow that pressed down humanity, in everything showing out what God is, but in everything also displaying what man ought to have been, and was not—Himself always absolute perfection, but perfection as *man* in dependence on God.

What, it may be asked, has this to do with us? Everything. It is not true that we only want propitiation, or as guilty sinners to be justified. We want life—eternal life. But have not the children of God eternal life? Certainly, but where shall I look at it? I see a beautiful trait of the divine life in this saint; I see something else sweet, and at the same time humbling to my soul, in another—perhaps where least expected. But in all there is weakness and even positive failure. Who would not confess it? who does not feel it? This, then, after all, is but an unworthy expression of what divine life is, because it is shaded too often and modified by the effect of the world, by the allowance of nature, by a thousand thoughts, feelings, ways, habits which do not savour of Christ. All these things break in upon and mar the perfect outshining of that new life that is communicated to all the children of God. And here is the blessedness of what the Holy Ghost at once ushers in without a single

note of preface,—without the smallest allusion to any other person or topic. With Christ before Him, could it be otherwise? There was but one adequate and worthy object of the Holy Ghost, and it was Christ. Neither was it at all requisite to say for whom John was inspired to write thus. Of necessity, Christ was for His own. For whom could Christ be portrayed, if not for the Christian? But then the suitable homage to Christ was to bring into prominence none but Christ Himself; and so we find the epistle of John opening in a way unlike any other. There may be some approach to analogy in the remarkable manner the apostle Paul writes to the Hebrews. He who writes and those who are written to are in the back ground, that God may unfold His ancient oracles about the Messiah His Son. But in Hebrews, the reason is rather the grace that condescended to Jewish weakness. In John, the reason is the all-eclipsing glory of Him, the Eternal Life, who deigns in grace and by redemption to be our life. It was John's allotted province thus to bring Christ before those that are His; and he has done so in the power of the Holy Ghost, and with a wisdom that proves itself altogether divine to him who has ears to hear.

Through such a revelation as this the great comfort is that God is showing His children, conscious of their own weakness, what in this respect grace has given them in Christ—what the very life is that they have received. Often cast down and groaning in the feeling of how little they manifest the life of Christ, and needing to know what His life—their life—Christ—is in its own excellency, they are directed to Himself. In its perfection it is seen in Christ alone.

This it is therefore that opens our epistle ; and what is the effect ? “ These things which we have seen and heard we announce to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.” The apostles had fellowship with the Son of God, and they were particularly chosen out, as we find in the Lord’s prayer (the proper prayer of the Lord, not that which is commonly so called in Matt. vi., Luke xi., blessed as it is, but in John xvii.) For it is evident that the apostles have a singularly distinguished place assigned them. But Christians also are immediately concerned ; for there is no doubt that others were to be brought in and to believe through their word. And thus they are expressly the objects of their Lord’s communications to the Father.

Here, too, the design was that others should have fellowship with the Son of God : the first favoured ones were not to keep it to themselves, but to spread abroad the riches of His grace. As we see in John xvii. that others were to believe through the apostles’ word, so here John acts on the intimation himself. The object is, “ that ye also may have fellowship with us ; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” It is with “ the Father,” because He communicates what He loves best. Never was anything, or one in His sight, so precious as the manifestation of His own Son in manhood here below. It was what opened the heavens, so to speak ; it was what caused the Father’s voice to be heard ; and this in various critical circumstances, where it might have seemed that a dishonouring shade hung over the Anointed of God. But not so ; it was but an appearance in the eyes of dimly seeing man—Christ was perfection always. Take,

for instance, the scene of His baptism; or, again, the mount of transfiguration. Our fellowship then is with the Father. He shares with us the object of His own delight.

But our fellowship is no less with His Son Jesus Christ, who lets us into the secret of the Father's love, and gives a place with Himself to His own, as far as it could be communicated to the creature. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

And what is the designed effect? Fulness of joy. "These things write we unto you that your joy may be full." If any believer, then, looks at Jesus as He was here below, and if the effect on his heart is to take away from the spring of joy in his soul, or to fail in ministering divine joy, it is clear that he has misapprehended God's own object and love. He has not interpreted aright the revelation of the Son of God. Now there are many that do so read the gospels. They derive far more joy from that which Paul brings before them in Romans v. or viii. One can understand this at first. Ought it to be so always? There are states no doubt where the clearing and consolidating chapters in the epistle to the Romans supply the requisite food of the soul. Nor could one in the least desire to weaken this, still less to set one part of scripture against or above another. But while assuredly in the first learning of salvation it is of consequence that we should be built up in the good news of grace that God sends us through the work of the Lord Jesus, the object of God in settling us on redemption is to make us free to enjoy the Son and the Father. We are not to be arrested along the way however precious, but to enjoy *Himself*

who has reconciled us by Jesus Christ,—to appreciate and adore our God and Father who has manifested His glory in Christ His Son. Short of this we cannot rightly stop. We may pause midway, but we ought to be going on until we can rest perfectly in this blessed communion of love—fellowship “with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

The effect then, I repeat, is fulness of joy. And mark, all this is simply from the manifestation of grace in Jesus Christ the Lord. There is not one question of ourselves, but the simplest receiving what God has brought and given us in His own Son; the intended issue is the overflowing of joy in the Holy Ghost.

But if we had a manifestation, there is also a message. The manifestation, with its connexions and result, was given us in the first four verses. The message begins from the fifth verse. If you have this life of Christ, if I too have it, if we who believe are brought thus into fellowship with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ,—if we possess the wondrous place of being (so to speak) in the family circle, and the most intimate affections of our God and Father through the Son of His love, I cannot be there, nor you, without the creating of a certain demand on our souls by virtue of the divine nature of which grace has made us alike partakers. No doubt love is the spring, but it is in truth; and the God who thus brings us by His own Son into the present enjoyment of life everlasting makes the soul sensible of the antagonism between the state of nature and of all around us with God Himself. But mark the grace of God: not a word of that whatever



until fulness of joy is established, and this solely by the gift of Jesus the Son of God to us, and eternal life in Him. But having given us the joy, now He turns us back, as it were, and gives the eye inwardly to discern as those enabled to see according to God,—to judge all that is of self, and consequently all false pretensions wherever they may be. It could not, ought not to be otherwise. We can afford to judge ourselves now that we have the fulness of the blessing, which is eternal life. Remember it, and Him in whom it is, and by whom only we could have it. God the Father has given in Christ that sure blessing, and assured it for ever, in order that the soul may be free to look at anything, and to take up everything in the interests of His own holiness and glory, as having fellowship with the Father and the Son.

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light.” It is not the Father now. In the early verses it was expressly and only as the Father, because there it was the outflow of grace through the Son. But now, this nature being communicated, we cannot if we would avoid having to do with God; and we feel for His will, holiness, and glory, just because we are so blest by His grace. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you.” It is not the law but a message. Grace does not put under law, but it *does* communicate the judgment of God Himself on all that is contrary to His nature.

The message is that God is light. Heathenism was founded on a quite contrary assumption. They supposed darkness to be the source of everything; but



not such is God to the Christian. "God is light." Consequently all is detected and judged. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Even Moses, in view of the hardness of men's hearts, allowed a little darkness; for the law made nothing perfect; it was not the perfect expression of God: Christ only is this. It is only divines, or those misled by their errors, who give His glory to the law as the image of God. But according to scripture (and it "cannot be broken") Christ is the image of God: never is the law so 'styled. The law had not to reveal God but to deal with man,—it condemned the first Adam. God under law had fallen sinful presumptuous man before Him. Law was really the expression of the lowest claim that God could assert over the first man had he been able to meet it. He could not abate those terms. It was the very least measure—the ten words—that God could accept even from a sinful man.

But it was altogether different when the Son of God came. Undoubtedly He vindicated the law, which fell through all other hands. Perfectly and in all things He retrieved the honour of God, which might else have seemed only committed to man to be sullied. Alas! the first man had done nothing but sin or break the law of God. The last Adam not only rescued the jewel from the filth of the men who had brought it into obloquy and turned it if not to corruption to their own ruin, but set it off so as to shed its own lustre and glorify the God who gave it. The mischief lay in sin, never in the smallest degree in the law. There was everything wrong in the first man; and this was the true secret. But to lower the Son of God to a mere doer of the law is un-

consciously to deny His divine glory; nay, it is unwittingly to deny even His human perfection. No doubt the Lord never failed to magnify the divine law; but I venture to say He never did one thing in which He did not go beyond the law. It must be maintained further that not to speak of Christ, the Christian, who does not go beyond the law does not understand, enjoy, or adorn Christianity. And so far is this rising above the character of law in our walk from being an extraordinary effort, it is what the Christian man is called to do every day in his life. I admit this, that you cannot even contemplate such a thing until you know your place in Christ, and that Christ risen is your life; but when this is a settled truth for your soul, you will soon understand its certainty and preciousness, as well as your own new responsibility, as living in the Spirit, to walk also by the Spirit.

Let me repeat once more the message—"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Nothing is now allowed in view of the hardness of their hearts. This was the license under law, as our Lord Jesus Himself tells us, but it will not stand the revealed light of the gospel. There is nothing tolerated except what suits the nature of God Himself. Christ, the reality of it in His own person and ways on earth, alone has brought us the revelation of this truth. Where was it ever seen or heard of before? It was seen and heard in every way, in every word, of Jesus. It was so because He was God, but it was never so till He became man. It is there we see adoringly the wondrous truth of the person of the Lord Jesus. As long as He remained simply God, no such manifestation was or could be. Had He been

merely man, it would have been simply impossible; but being not only what He *was*, but who He *is*, in Him here below we have God as well as man perfectly displayed. This it is that judges—judges everything in us.

Accordingly there follows the various testings of this divine nature in the believer. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” It is no longer a question merely of an open falsehood. Of course this cannot but remain always immoral and inexcusable; and its true gravity is brought out incomparably more under the gospel than ever it was under the law. But then what is spoken of here goes far deeper than a pronounced lie; it might be only such virtually and practically—a lie that we live and do where we may not speak one. “If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” The Christian walks in the light; and the reason why he walks there is this, because he sees Christ, who alone is the light of life. And if he sees and follows Christ, which all His sheep do, he cannot but walk in the light, because following Jesus, who is the light, he necessarily walks in the light.

I do not say that he necessarily walks *according to* the light. This is a very different matter, often confounded with it, but in fact wholly distinct, though it too ought to be. But every Christian walks *in* the light. If he is walking according to it, then glory is brought to the Lord; if, as is too often the case, he fails to walk according to the light, he dishonours the Lord so much the more because he does walk in the light.

A Jew as such did not walk in the light. When God had His dealings with Israel, there was nothing of the

kind. He, though always light Himself, dwelt in the thick darkness. Not that He was darkness: this never was nor could be; but He dwelt in the dark, veiled and shut up by curtains and clouds of incense, sacrifices and priests. Thus He dwelt because man was in the dark; and God, by the very fact that He dwelt surrounded by His people Israel, dwelt in dark seclusion in view of the condition of Israel—the first man—in whose midst He deigned to dwell.

But now that Christ the Son is come, the full unclouded light of God shines out in love. Accordingly, as we have seen, He reveals Himself as light, with whom is no darkness at all. More than this, “if we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” Further, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” This total and evident contrast is what every Christian by his Christian profession assumes. If you are a Christian at all, you walk in the light; it is *where* you walk, and not here a question of *how*. The apostle John is not here at all discussing how far it may be made good, or how far you have realised it—albeit an important question for conscience. Here he is showing what is true and real, and so absolutely necessary that it is involved in the very being of a Christian man.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light” (for Christ can be no less a standard than this) “we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Manifestly he is describing, not some special class

among the faithful, but all genuine Christians, whoever they may be. As having seen and followed the Lord Jesus, they walk in the light, and being in that light, where all sin is judged, there is fellowship mutually. For the fellowship here is not with the Father and the Son: this had been already settled in the early verses. But here John is speaking of the communion of Christians one with another; and he says that being in the light of God (because the light is no less than Christ), the hindrances to fellowship are judged:—"We have fellowship one with another." You see it every day, and wherever you may be. If you pass through any circumstances where you look to find no Christian, a little word is dropped,—Christ's own name, or that which betrays to your heart the sense of His grace, and at once you are knit to the man, no matter who,—indeed, the more, so to speak, because of the sound falling on your heart in such unexpected circumstances:—"We have fellowship one with another." Then there is another comfort not less needed—"that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Such is the precious place grace has given us, the ever abiding power of the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from every sin.

This is not put here as a provision against our failure and for our restoration. The apostle treats of the place in which we are set by the grace of God from the beginning of our Christian career, and which remains unchanged right through. No doubt the apostle does not contemplate such a thing here as the departure of a real Christian from Christ. Still less, if possible, does he contemplate a Christian's trifling with sin: this



could not be, for the Spirit of God never does. We shall find, however, in its own just place, that if he slip into evil of a practical kind, or sin, God does not leave him without a resource. The grace that never fails appears for the child, if he have been drawn aside. But this is not at all the object in the verse before us, which is simply the assertion of the Christian's place; and this, too, when it is a question of God's own nature, which might produce (not searching only, but) trial and anxiety in the spirit. But if there is, the very place where the power of the blood of Jesus Christ cannot fail to cleanse you from all sin is asserted.

But there might be another form of pretension. Instead of setting up to fellowship with God, while indifferent to His will, without sense of or care for standing in the light of God, the flesh might assume another character of delusion—the denial of sin. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” By a Christian is not meant one insensible to his own sinfulness. The truth is in him; and he confesses instead of hiding or ignoring his sins. He has fellowship with God; but, far from saying along with this “I have no sin,” he is the very man that hates and spreads out his sins before God. Accordingly verse 9 tells the tale of that which grace and truth effect in the Christian: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” So the Christian does from the very starting-point of his career.

Still less does the Christian refuse to own that he has sinned. This is a yet grosser form of contrariety to the truth of God. Therefore the condemnation is still more



stern: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." The word of God, not to speak of conscience, declares so plainly that all have sinned, that it proves the audacity of unbelief and rebelliousness in those that deny, and this denial is incomparably more guilty since Christ came, to whose name these deniers laid claim.

This then closes the second part of the chapter. The first was the manifestation of the fulness of grace in Christ; the next, the detection of what is contrary to God in us. Hence we are now judged before God in His light. Having a nature which feels according to God, we at once discover what is inconsistent with Himself. For this very reason the Christian would be extremely cast down if, when drawn aside through the power of the enemy, there were not the provision of grace to meet and restore his soul. Hence two verses follow in the beginning of chapter ii. as a sort of appendix to the doctrine and application of the first chapter: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for . . . the whole world." I leave out "*the sins of.*" It is clear enough that they ought never to have been inserted in the common English Bible. Not only are they not required for the sense, as words generally are, but they injure the sense, and really insinuate erroneous doctrine. If the sins of the whole world were met by the propitiation of Christ, the whole world would be saved. No such statement occurs anywhere in the

word of God. There is a righteous ground in the sacrifice of Christ on which God can meet the whole world—not only bear with it, but send the gospel to every creature. This, however, is a totally different statement from a “propitiation for the sins of the whole world.” In the real phrase it is clear that we have the beautiful wisdom of scripture, and at the same time an exact expression of the Lord’s rich grace without exaggeration: “My little children, I write unto you that ye sin not;” but if any one should alas! sin, instead of cause for despair, “we have an advocate with the Father.” Wondrous mercy! Jesus as much lives to take up the failure of His own, as He died to put away their sins by His blood. This too is founded on propitiation; but there is besides the blessed fact that He is the righteousness of the believer in the presence of God. His one expiatory sacrifice avails in abiding value; His place is before God as our righteousness; and there for the failing He carries on His living active advocacy with the Father.

Such is the doctrinal ground of this epistle, with the added special provision for those who may fail.

From chapter ii. 3 we begin the consideration of the characteristics of life in Christ which the believer possesses, and is bound to manifest. What is the leading trait? what the especial features of divine life in man? It is not power, nor love, nor even righteousness. What is it then? Obedience. This, it is clear, gives no importance to man. It necessitates the just subjection of the creature, and maintains also the majesty of God. How dreadful when grace, so-called, lowers His glory in

the eyes of any soul ! It is not denied that danger there is ; but the danger is fully met by the precious word of God : “And hereby we do know that we know\* him, if we keep his commandments.” Do not call this legal : where is anything of the sort in John ? Indeed there can be nothing legal in one who under the Holy Spirit unfolds Christ. And let me say further that, where love is, nothing is sweeter than the doing the will of the one that is loved, particularly where we know that He whose will we do is absolutely good and wise in all that He lays upon us. We know that this is the case with God.

“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” He is no Christian at all, any more than those that pretended to have fellowship with Him and walked in darkness, or said they had no sin, or denied that they had sinned. The contrast is of real Christians with mere pretenders. It is not a comparison between faithful Christians and unfaithful ones. Banish all this kind of notion from your minds. It is delusion, and you lose thereby the profit for your soul. It is not what the Lord is treating of here. He is putting down a new class of evil that was beginning to spring up, of persons pretending to fresh light, but involving a departure from the only light of God,—persons who indulged in fine-spun speculations and claimed undiscovered truth, but were in the

\* The first “know” is in the present, this (the second) in the perfect, *ἐγνώκαμεν*, which means (not “have known,” but) “have the knowledge of.”

awful predicament of contradicting the revealed mind of God. It was a different Christ, who was not another but antichrist, as we shall see,—a different truth which was not really truth.

The characteristic object of the epistle is to maintain that none can ever rise above the Christ already manifested in this world. After all you may have learnt from Paul or any other, know as you may the Christian's place in grace and all he hopes for in glory, if you want to behold perfection in man you must look back at what Christ was in this world—the self-same Jesus who is now in the glory of God. Such is Christ everywhere. There is a season when one needs most of all to think of the cross. There is a season when one needs the comfort of having Him as the Priest in heaven. There is a season when one can appreciate Him as the glorious Head of the church. But it is false that any of these points of view is to make Christ less precious as manifested in this world. Nor is there one who treats it with such decision and solemnity as John. The time was come for this: "Even now are many antichrists." It is the very point and object of our apostle's writing to maintain the indefeasible glory and the infinite excellence of the Lord Jesus in every respect, and this as displaying God the Father in this world. This Satan was seeking to annul through the false teachers now in view. Therefore are we shown from the first, as I have endeavoured to explain, the fulness of grace that came in His person, as well as the revelation of the moral nature of God. But now we have the first great test of the reality of divine life in man, namely, obedience. In this the unbeliever, no

matter what his profession may be, is sure to fail. His will is unjudged. He either seeks his own way in pleasure, or he bows to man in superstitious asceticism, without knowledge of the true God or confidence in His grace. His failure is not perhaps in notions, but in obedience. On the other hand the Christian keeps the commandments of God; but he goes farther. It is said, "Whoso keepeth his word." It is more than what is commanded.

He loves to do whatever may be the will of God, no matter what the form. It may be simply seeing how He manifests His character in Christ: this is enough. The obedient heart enters into and ascertains the will of God where disobedience would find nothing but difficulties, obstacles, and uncertainties. There is always to such either a lion in the way or no light. We find it too often in our families. See a child whose heart is not in obedience: what readiness of excuse! "Indeed, I did not know. You never told me. Why did you not forbid me before?" On the other see the obedient child. She has watched her mother's looks even when not the appearance of a command was heard. She knows right well what will please her parent. Just so should we cherish the will of our Father as obedient children. It is not in this case the keeping of the express commands, but of His *word*. Let me add, that this is the answer to all the pride of man's heart. For take the most moral man you ever saw: on what does he rest? He does this and that because he judges them right. This is his boast: "I always do what I believe is right." Such is the desire of the moral man. I answer, that even *if* always consistent, and you always did a thing



because it is right, you must inevitably be always wrong.

The true ground for a believer, and that which pleases God, is this,—not to do a thing simply because it is right, but because it is His will. The life that is formed on obedience is of an altogether different texture and source. To do things because they are right is to do without God and His word. It is merely idolizing self. The man becomes judge of all: “I think this, I do that, because it is right in my judgment.” Obedience alone puts man down, and God in His place. This only is right. Hence therefore we find, as the first distinguishing trait of the divine life, the exercise of obedience: not only are His commandments to be kept, but also His word.

But there is more than this. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” I need not only commandment and word, but *Himself* as a living person before my eyes. It is always thus in John, who treats of Christ Himself. Thus while providing for the deepest, there is a grace which wins the simplest. It is clearly Christ Himself, as He walked day by day in this poor world.

But there follows another and a remarkable word, which needs a little explanation. “Beloved,” says he (for this is the true word in verse 7), “I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning.” It means, as before, from the time that Christ was manifested in this world. “The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you.”



The old commandment was manifested in Christ Himself. He alone was always the obedient one. It is now not merely an old commandment, but a new one, yet the very same. Why? Because it is the same life, whether viewed in the Christian or in Christ. If I look at Christ Himself, it is the old commandment seen in Him from the beginning; but now it is no longer this solely, but a new commandment, "which thing is true in him and in you." It is the same life, seen in Christ in its perfection, in us often hindered and obscured by the activity of what is of the first man. Christ alone was its fulness; now we have it in Him. As John tells us, it is true in Him and in you because it is the very same life.

"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now." Love now comes in. It is not disobedience only which detects that a man is not really born of God, but also hatred. He that loves not is not born of God. "But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." This was the more important to press, because these false teachers had not the smallest concern about their brethren. What they sought was self—in one form or another; and consequently light, as they called it, was no more than the invention of novel notions. But the true way in which divine light (Christ) shows itself is in obedience as its effect, and so surely in love. You cannot obey God without loving your brethren also.

This, however, leads into a remarkable parenthesis in the epistle, on which we need not dwell, because it is

perhaps more than any other part of the epistle familiar to all. The great characteristic throughout, being life in the Son of God, forbids the apostle from entering into the different measures of attainment as a rule; yet as it is a fact that there are some more mature, some more vigorous, and some comparatively feeble in the expression of Christ here below, the Spirit of God in this parenthesis notices these differences briefly.

Before this is done, He lays down what they had all in common. They were forgiven for Christ's name.

Then the fathers were known by their knowledge of Christ—a beautiful and blessed distinction. They had “known him that was from the beginning.” This we have seen to be the great text of the whole epistle, and it is the more remarkable that he does not mention any depths or heights of knowledge. Not a word is said about dispensations, or prophecy, or anything that is thought abstruse. There was one that was beyond all others and included everything else: it was Christ Himself. The fathers were those marked by knowing Him. Wherever they might have learned, however their vigour might once have gone forth, they came back to what they started with—even Christ. It was a deeper appreciation of Christ, and this as manifesting God the Father here below. Such are the fathers.

The young men went forward in the ways of God, undaunted by difficulties, feeding on the word, and overcoming the wicked one. The babes (*παιδιά*) had a real enjoyment of the Father's love.

The apostle traverses the ground again, and in doing so simply repeats in so many words what he had said of the fathers, adding a little more as to the young

men, and most of all when he comes to the babes. The gracious condescension of love in this must be manifest to any spiritual mind. Those are peculiarly the objects of our Father's care who need it most. The babes therefore have the chief place in this expanded form. The fathers did not so much want it. It is in addressing the babes that we find the development of the antichrists. They require to be guarded against. They abound in snares and seductions. We have therefore very important light as to the nature of the antichrists; and this consists of two great parts. All Jewish hope is denied, and so is all Christian truth. He denies the Christ, that is, the Jewish expectation. He denies the Father and the Son, and that is the sum of Christianity. Such the antichrist will be—the result of a total rejection of both Old Testament and New. He denies the object of a Jew's faith, and also the person into whose love and fellowship the gospel brings those who believe now. All this will be completely swamped by the antichrist. This is the very point to which things are rapidly carrying men in the world at the present moment. I do not mean to say that more than currents everywhere are setting in toward that direction; but undoubtedly there is an undermining of the Old Testament, and a total ignoring as well as a growing rejection of the true grace of God in the New.

After all this is closed, in verse 28, the whole family are seen joined together as little children once more. "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence." The way in which people commonly understand it is, that *you* may

have confidence, but it is "*we* may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." This is exceedingly blessed. He appeals to divine love in the saints. Do *you* be careful how you are walking; that when Christ appears, *we* may not be ashamed because of the little you have profited by the grace and the truth of God we have been ministering to you in Christ. This seems the meaning of it. "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him."

Now he is going to enlarge on the subject of righteousness. However, before he enters into it fully, he gives us a prefatory note beginning with the last verse of chapter ii., and then shows us the privileges into which grace brings those who are born of God.

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God." It may be mentioned here that "sons of God" is never the expression of the writings of John. We have "sons of God" as well as "children" in Paul's epistles. But "children of God" the Holy Ghost employs exclusively both in the gospel and in this epistle of John. Is it asked what is the difference? It lies in this, that *son* (υἱός) is more the public title, whereas *child* (τέκνον) conveys rather the closeness of connexion by birth. It expresses community of nature as born of God. For it will be understood that a person who was not a child might be adopted as a son; but the Christian is not only a son adopted by our God—he is really a child as being a partaker of the divine nature. This only it is John puts forward and prominently speaks of; and it is seen at once how it connects itself

with his doctrine everywhere. We are born of God,—born of water and of the Spirit, made partakers of the divine nature (in the sense, of course, of having the life that was in Christ). “Therefore the world knew us not, because it knew him not.”

So absolutely is the life of Christ found in us, that we have the same fare, so to speak, as Christ in this world. The world did not know Him; therefore it does not know us. It is simply because of Christ, unknown then personally, unknown now in us who live of His life. When He was here, it was no other life than that which we now have in Him. The world never knew, never appreciated, the life that was in Christ; neither does it recognise that which is in the children of God. But this can in no way hinder the blessedness of the result for the children of God.

This is no mere empty title. “Beloved, now are we the sons (children) of God; and it doth not yet appear” (that is, it has not been manifested) “what we shall be.” As far as the word of God could show, (and how well it does!) it is clearly revealed there. This remark is added to cut off misapprehension of the sense, as it may hinder the vagueness that prevails in many minds. Indeed, an hope has been revealed to us most distinctly: what we shall be is revealed not only elsewhere, but here also. The apostle does not at all overlook this. But “it doth not yet appear,” in the sense that it has not yet been manifested as a fact before the world; but “*we know*,” says he, and we only know because it has been revealed by the Holy Ghost in the word. “We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” There is no haze over



the future of the child of God. He has the certainty in his soul, because he has the revealed assurance in scripture that he shall be like Christ. Christ being his life now, no wonder that he must be like Christ then ; and this too is founded on a ground blessedly sure and simple, and at the same time full of glory to Christ: "We shall *see him*." This is enough. Such and so great is the gracious assimilating energy of the Second man, that for us to see Him is to be like Him. When we saw Him here on earth by faith, we were made spiritually like Him ; when we shall see Him bodily by and by, we shall be like Him even in our bodies.

Such then is the portion of the Christian by grace ; and here is the moral consequence : "Every one that hath this hope on him"—founded on Him—"purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Thus for the Christian it is not any longer a law that demands this thing or that. There is the full operation of the Spirit by the entire word of God, no part of scripture being excluded from the enjoyment, instruction, and admonition of the Christian. At the same time, what gives all scripture its fulness of application to the believer is the possession and knowledge of Christ Himself. Without Him you cannot understand any part of the Bible spiritually—that is, neither certainly nor thoroughly. It is Christ, who not only gives us intelligence, but gives it power by the Spirit over and in us.

Then John proceeds naturally to trace the difference between the two families : "Every one that committeth sin committeth also lawlessness." I give you the sense rather more exactly than it stands in our common version. There is no allusion to transgressing the law.



Perhaps there is hardly a worse translation than this in the New Testament, nor one as to which even scholars seem duller. Sin is declared to be lawlessness. Beyond a shadow of doubt it may be asserted that the apostle does not define sin as "the transgression of the law." It is a false version which nothing can justify, and I am perfectly persuaded the more any man understands either the word of God in general or the language in which John wrote, with the less hesitation he will confess this. That a person who is only spelling out his Greek, and learning to render by the help of the Authorized Version, may make difficulties about the matter is intelligible; but it is hard to see how an unbiassed honest man who knows the language could have the slightest question about it. Do I insinuate that our translators were not men of integrity, able, erudite, and pious? They were under no small difficulties, but they tried to do their best. Possibly their attention was never drawn to the point. Even intelligent men were considerably muddled as yet from the past as well as the actual struggles of that day. But instead of either finding fault with them or endorsing all they said, what we have to do is to profit by whatever is good and true, and at the same time to be warned by whatever mistakes others have made.

Now I maintain, not only that the word (*ἀνομία*) will not bear such a meaning, but that it is altogether foreign to the scope of the passage and the drift of the apostle's reasoning. He is not speaking of particular acts, but about nature manifesting itself in our ways. "Every one that committeth sin committeth also lawlessness." A man who sins shows his will alienated from God—an

evil nature derived from him who fell through Satan. Here the apostle regards man as doing nothing else but his own will, which is exactly what the natural man does. He acts independently of God, and, as far as he is concerned, never does anything but his own will. John is not speaking of positive overt acts, but of the man's habitual bent and character—his life and nature. The sinner, then, sins, and in this merely shows out his state and the moral roots of his nature as a sinner (namely, lawlessness). He has neither heart nor conscience towards God : he does what he likes as far as he can. He practises lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

What makes it of practical as well as dogmatic importance is, that the common view entails the accompanying error that the law is always in force for all the necessary expression of God's mind and will. But this we know from many scriptures is not true. The Bible is thoroughly explicit, that one particular nation was said to be under law, and that the rest of mankind had no such position, though responsible on their own ground. (See Rom. ii. 12–15; iii. 19.) Here, therefore, the translation cannot be correct which contradicts other passages of undoubted holy writ; for if the common version of 1 John iii. 4 held good, the rest of mankind outside the Jews could not have been sinners at all, because they were not under law. Thus, evidently, this error throws the whole doctrine of what sin is and of God's dealings with men into hopeless confusion. It necessarily darkens some vitally momentous parts of God's word as to past, present, and future. For instance, according to the scripture already referred to, in the day of judgment God will by Jesus

Christ deal with the Jew according to the law, with the Gentiles that have it not according to conscience ; and, by parity of principle, with professing Christians according to gospel light. There is no hint of judging all by the measure which was given to Israel. The idea springs from a source no better than traditional ignorance.

Again, taking Romans iv. 15 ; and v. 13, 14, it would perplex all to bring in the common version of 1 John iii. 4 ; for it would follow thence that there was no sin, because it had not the form of a transgression of law between Adam, who had *a* law, and Moses, by whom *the* law was given. So fatal may be a mis-translation of scripture. In fact, practically, it lowers the sense of what sin is throughout the length and breadth of Christendom, others having fallen into an error similar to that of our own translators. It is therefore as certain as it is important to see that sin embraces much more than a transgression of the law. In this case there could be no such thing as sin without the law, and all would be judged alike as under the law and transgressors of it, contrary to the express word of God. Our version is wrong. Sin is not the transgression of the law, though every transgression of the law is a sin. The true meaning, as I have said, is, "sin is lawlessness."

As for the Christian, then, to resume our sketch, all is different (not conduct only but rather a new nature) from man as such. We know that He (Christ) was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him is no sin. "Whosoever abideth in him"—and this is the consequence of really knowing Christ—"sinneth not." Such

is the life of the Christian that this is the consequence of abiding in Him. If grace has turned my soul to Him, if I am resting on Christ as my Saviour and Lord, my life and righteousness, I shall also by grace abide in Him, and "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not." In fact, who ever sinned with Christ before his eyes? When a Christian is drawn aside, another object usurps the place of Christ, and his own will exposes him to the wiles of Satan working on his fleshly nature through the world. And "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." He evidently speaks of one unconverted—a man in his natural state. If he had only seen and known Christ, how changed all would be!

"Little children, let no man deceive you." This the false teachers and antichrists were doing. They had invented the awful theory that the great blessing of Christ had swept away all need of self-judgment and holiness—that sin was gone in every sense. Hence a believer might take his ease in the world. If Christ had taken away all sin, why talk more about it? What need of repentance or confession, as the croakers talked who refused to go on to higher life and truth? "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that doeth sin is of the devil."

Here we see the ground for saying that John traces all up to two distinct families—the family of God and that of the devil. "The devil sinneth from the beginning:" such is his character, though *he* is not under law. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." That was *His* character, and the result of His appearing and

work in this world. "Every one that has been born of God doth not sin." Such is the deduction: "for his seed remaineth in him;"—the life that God has given through faith, Christ Himself being the source and expression of it—"and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." There is shown the new nature. It is a matter of course that every one lives according to his nature: only the Christian, having two, must mortify the evil and walk according to the good. Take the simplest animal,—the bird above, or the reptile below, or any other around us,—every creature lives according to its nature. So does the sinner. He lives according to that nature which is now under Satan's power. The believer lives in Christ. John is not here looking at modifications through circumstances, it is to be observed. He is not here looking at particular cases of unfaithfulness. John as a rule does not occupy himself with the details of fact. He looks at truth in its own proper abstract character apart from passing circumstances; and if you do not read John's writings thus, especially the epistle before us, I am afraid that there is little prospect that you will ever understand them.

Having shown this, he now brings in the other test, that is, not simply righteousness but love. "This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain"—no love was there. "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother." There is the connexion. He has brought in the wicked one and his family. Man now is not only a sinner, but especially shows his character in this, that he exhibits no love. By love he means what is of God, and this exclusively. He does not of course deny natural affection,



but insists on love as divine. Cain had no love, and proved it by slaying his own brother. "And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." He here traces the link that binds righteousness with love. We have had righteousness separately as well as love: now he shows that the two things are intertwined, and are found only in the same persons. But here too, as in Christ was no sin, so in Him we behold perfect love, and in the world hatred. Ought we then to be surprised at the world's hatred? Hence, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Every one that hateth his brother is a murderer."

Thus things are followed to their full result, as we have seen them traced to their hidden sources before God. How different was all with Christ! "Hereby perceive we the love" . . . To add "of God" spoils the sentence. There is no ground for interpolating any words. But One showed such love, and He was man as surely as God. "Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down his life for us." If you want to know what love is, look here. This was love indeed. "And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." The same life of which we live was in Him: ought it not to be exercised in similar love? We may not often be called to lay down our life for our brethren; but are there not plain, simple, common ways by which it may be tested every day? My brother may have need: it is no use talking about readiness to die for my brother, if I at once shrink back from meeting his ordinary and perhaps urgent necessity? There is nothing great here; it is homely,

but how practical! How it puts the heart to the test, and one that might be presented any day of the week!

“Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” He here puts before them the great danger of trifling with the practical consequences of the truth. Suppose that a man knows what God says and wishes, and yet does not act upon it, what is the consequence? He must get into consciousness of distance from God. “To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin,” says James. So we have the same question here. The point is not a man’s losing his place in Christ, but his ground of confidence with God. Communion is almost as strikingly a characteristic point of John, as life in Christ, and the love from which both flow. He is not satisfied that men should be simply Christians, but that they should enjoy Christ practically. An idle word, a passing thought unjudged, might disturb this.

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” Looking up, a simple soul goes on with the Lord. “Then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” It is the beginning of everything good,

and goes right through to the end, as I need not say. There is the one and only starting-point in the mind of the Holy Ghost, who always gives Christ His own primary place. To be saved even is not put as the first duty, but to "believe on his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him."

Here we come to a very important expression, which we find more particularly in chapter iv. It is not simply our dwelling in Him: this we had already in ch. i. (and *abiding* in Him is the same word); but He dwells in *us*. Wonderful truth! This is here applied to one of these two things. "Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Holy Spirit which he hath given us." The Holy Ghost given to us is the palmary proof that God abides in us. He dwells in us by His Spirit. This does not necessarily involve our abiding in God; but if God gives His Spirit to any believer, He abides in that man. We shall find more than this in what follows; but before these truths are explained more fully, John cautions the saints.

Hence chapter iv. begins with this warning. He is going to tell us about the Spirit of God and His abiding in us, but he would have us on our guard because there are evil spirits, as certainly as the Holy Spirit, and this as proved by the false prophets that have gone out into the world. "Believe not every spirit." There is nothing that exposes the believer (and it has always been so) to greater danger, than severing the Holy Spirit from Christ. The apostle ever binds His power

with Christ's name. We shall be kept in the truth if we remember that the one object of the Holy Ghost is to glorify Christ, and this therefore becomes the test in practice: the Spirit of God must ever operate to keep Christ before our eyes. If not, we are not far from a snare. Connect the Spirit with the church merely, and then you will have popery; connect Him simply with individuals, and you will have fanaticism. He is a free and evident witness to Christ. There is the truth. The Holy Ghost is sent down to take of the things of Christ, and to show them to us. He is come to glorify (not a priest nor even the church, but) Christ Himself. This, I admit, is the truest glory of the saint and the church—their greatest blessedness and joy. In Christ's name the church is formed by the Holy Ghost; through Him also the Holy Ghost dwells in the believer. This is not doubted; but all this, and the testimony and ways of each and all are invariably for exalting our God by Christ Himself. If they fail here, the salt has lost its savour.

Take, I will not say the grossness of popery but, the Quaker system, as an instance which painfully reverses the truth. The reason is plain: the Spirit is practically severed from Christ, and the result is that, under colour of humility, their testimony constantly tends to exalt the first man. Every child of Adam is supposed to have the Spirit of God. The consequence is that the truth is darkened, impaired, and destroyed, and all due sense of the ruin of man destroyed by their extreme form of Pelagianism, deifying not ordinances indeed but conscience.

However this may be, here we find the apostle

solemnly warning the saints against false prophets. Many such men were gone into the world. We want therefore some sure means of discerning them. It is not a question of deciding who are Christ's and who are not; but rather what sort of spirit it is that acts by this teacher or that. It is not at all the point to pronounce on man's state before God or his destiny. People have always been prone enough to form and give opinions when the Lord forbids it. It is clear that we are called of the Lord frankly to accept persons as born of God when they render a true testimony to Christ; but, on the other hand, we ought to beware of endorsing those whose testimony in word or deed is against the name of Jesus.

This then is the test of what is or is not of the Holy Ghost. "Hereby ye know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God." Let me beg the reader here to leave out a word or two which are not printed in italics. "Every spirit that confesseth *that* Jesus Christ *is* come in the flesh is of God." The difference is great. As it reads in the Authorised Version, it is altogether inadequate. It may be in the recollection of not a few here that a generation ago there were manifestations of spirits (evil, I doubt not), which did not deny that Jesus came in the flesh. On the contrary, they seemed to lay the greatest stress on the fact of His incarnation, and chid the orthodox for want of heed to this truth if not of faith in it. The point of their own false doctrine lay in maintaining that Jesus took the flesh in the same condition of corruption in which all others are born, and that Jesus showed His perfection in subduing and



purifying the flesh. Of course you will understand that my reference is to the Irvingite movement. To confess therefore *that* Jesus *is* come in the flesh is not satisfactory.

What then does the apostle say and mean here? Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God. This is to confess His person; not His deity alone, still less His humanity alone, but Him who thus came. The one is a bare acknowledgment of a fact; the other is the confession of a divine person, yet a man. Now there is no demon that ever acknowledges the person of Christ. There is no evil spirit but winces at and refuses to endorse the glory of Christ; whereas the direct object of the Spirit of God is always to maintain His person in all the fulness of His glory, and in all His grace. Let none take it as a statement of His human nature. This is not the meaning. The real humanity of Jesus is contained in it, but it is by no means the whole or chief part of the confession. Take any man—yourself, for instance; who would describe you as having come in the flesh? No man that had common sense; because one might well ask in what other way you could come. Here was the difference between the Son of God and any other that ever was born. All mankind must come in the flesh if they come at all. The wonderful thing was that this divine person should come in the flesh. For what claim had flesh on Him in the slightest degree? Nothing but His grace hindered His coming in His proper divine glory. Had He been thus manifested in this world, of course it must have involved the destruction of all the race. According to the will and counsels of the Godhead He

was pleased to come in the flesh. It was not the manifestation of glory save of His person morally and in love, but of that very grace which we have seen from the beginning of this epistle, and which runs through to the end.

The spirits, then, which are not of God refuse (save when divine power bent and broke them) to own the personal glory of Christ, while the Holy Spirit of God loves to own it. Such is the test. If therefore any doctrine undermine the glory of Christ, you have an unequivocal proof that it is of Satan as certainly: whatever exalts Christ, according to the word, is of God.

This leads him to speak of the difference of what is in the world from that which is of God. In the world there is ever at work a restless spirit of contrariety to Christ. It is the spirit of antichrist, which will be manifested fully in its own season. Hence it is said, "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." These false teachers being of the world, speak of what has their heart, and this attracts the world. There is sympathy between the world and them. "We are of God," says the apostle, speaking of himself and his fellows raised up to declare the word of God fully. He is peremptory; and this rouses the spirit of unbelief as it meets faith: "He that knoweth God heareth us; and he that is not

of God heareth not us." Here again is a serious test. It is not only the confession of Christ, but that man is proved to be of the world who refuses subjection to the apostolic word. Many a man might profess to acknowledge the literal words of Jesus; many another might own only those of the Old Testament. If you do no more than this now, you cannot be of God. He who is really of God, while thoroughly owning every word He wrote of old, feels especially the blessedness of that which He has now given by His holy apostles and prophets. (Compare Eph. ii. iii.) This was of the utmost moment to urge at the time the gospels and epistles appeared. At the same time, though not of course in exactly the same shape and manner, it always abides a grand test, next to the person of Christ. The time hastens which will prove how few among those that acknowledge the New Testament really hear and believe it. The saddest proof that they do not believe it to be God's word will be their giving it up. Did they believe it, they would no more abandon it than the true mother would allow the child to be cut in twain.

But this brings us to another point—not the truth, but loving one another. The truth comes first, and then love. "For love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God" (whatever may be his pretensions and his talk); "for God is love."

This leads him to speak of the way in which God has shown His love. He brings it out in three forms. First, there is the wondrous manifestation of God in Christ which is the foundation of the gospel; and in a twofold

way also He was manifested in Christ—as life, and as propitiation. If we had not Christ as life, we never could understand God. Could we have understood Him by having Christ as our life without propitiation, as His holiness and judgment would have been slighted, so we could only be intensely miserable. To have the knowledge of what God is and of what we are, and withal not to have our sins borne away, must be alike His dishonour and our everlasting shame and anguish; and so many a quickened soul who is ignorant of the efficacy of redemption proves in its measure. God in His great mercy does not permit any to know it to its depths. But how many of us have known what it is to be converted, and yet for a while ignorant of the judgment of sin, and its absolute removal for us by the cross of Christ! Consequently one had no taste for the world, a horror of sin, a real desire to do God's will, but not the least rest for heart and conscience in Christ before God. It is a mercy to be thus converted, a misery to abide in this state. What a joy that God does not divorce but unites for us life and propitiation in our Lord and His work! Let not man meddle here. What God has joined let no man put asunder. He has given the same Christ who is life to be also a propitiation for our sins. Such is the teaching of the verses 9, 10, both being the display of the love of God, and in contrast with law (the latter especially), which had no life to give, and could only judge, not put away, sin.

But this is not all. "If God so loved us" (and He has demonstrated it as nothing else could), "we also ought to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us,

and his love is perfected in us." It is a wonderful word, evidently connecting itself (whether written before or after is of no account) with what is said in John i. 18. There Christ stands the manifestation of God in love. Here the saints are called to be no less. Beloved brethren, how far do we manifest our God and Father by this divine love that never seeks its own, and is at all cost bent on the good of its objects, His children, yea all, even enemies?

"Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." This goes farther than the last verse of chap. iii., which said that He dwells in us, not we in Him. But we shall see more of this, and therefore I do not pause on it now. "And we have seen and testify that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."

I hardly know anything that concerns us more profoundly affecting than these verses; for what can be conceived near to God, if it be not dwelling in God and God in us? There is no image that tells out intimacy and mutuality, so to speak, more than this. And when we think who and what God is, as well as what we are, it is indeed a great word to say. Of whom does the apostle say it? Of every Christian; and this too as the simple fruit of the gospel.

But let us look a little at the force of the passage more closely. In the one case we read, "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit;" in the other it is, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth



in him, and he in God." It is not now said, "*Hereby we know.*" In this instance, perhaps, the person may be without objective knowledge of it: this does not hinder the truth of the blessing. If you confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in you, and you in God. He dwells in you, having given His Spirit to be in you.

This is the way in which His dwelling in man is effected; but the consequence of that gift to you is that you make God your refuge and delight. There is no such thing as the dwelling of the Spirit in a saint without bringing the soul to judge itself, as well as to peace with God. To this it seems to me that every Christian comes by grace sooner or later, though not always at first. He will be brought to it in God's goodness, were it, as it is often, on a death-bed. We do not always judge aright. There may be not seldom hindrances to comfort through bad teaching, as well as through unjudged sin. Of these I do not speak now, nor of defect in intelligence. Still less do I speak of the effects of the Calvinistic system or of Arminianism, both of which are prejudicial to enjoying the grace of God. Calvinists are apt to think an Arminian cannot have peace. This is all nonsense: he may enjoy peace with God as really as the Calvinist. Indeed experience would say it is more frequent than with those of the opposite school, though each in a different way look within (I believe, unscripturally). The truth is that peace rests on our faith of Christ and His work. Arminianism is no more to me than Calvinism, and I doubt that I admire one more than the other. As systems they seem to me narrow, unsound, and pernicious. But I thank God that

to not a few who are committed to both sides He has given to taste of His own grace in Christ.

Be this as it may, if I confess Jesus the Son of God as Him on whom my soul rests, and on His rich redemption, the Holy Ghost says, "I can dwell there." He *does* dwell there; and if so, He is graciously pleased to draw out the heart to confide and repose in God. This is what is meant by dwelling in God. It is to find in God one's hiding-place, as well as spring of counsel and cheer and strength. One turns to Him in each trial and difficulty as well as joy. I am pretty sure there is not one of us who uses this privilege as he ought. Nor does John speak of degree at all. Such a thought is foreign to the abstract style of the apostle John. He treats of a great fact for the Christian, though it may be more or less realized, and "God dwelleth in him, and he in God." This is what faith receives and has. The beginning is God making His abode in us; the result is that we dwell in God. But sometimes he puts it in the order of our dwelling in God and God in us. It would seem that he then speaks of experience, where he puts our part first, and then God's abode in us.

I must briefly point out the third ground,—not the display of love, or its operation in us, but the perfection of love with us (verse 17). It is not only that we know that we dwell in God and He in us by this, that He has given to us of His Spirit; but herein has love been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. It is not a state given to us in the day of judgment; we are so dealt with now; but this

gives boldness even with the thought of the day of judgment before us. How could it be otherwise? If I really believe and am sure that God has made me now to be what Christ is, what can the effect of the day of judgment be but to display the perfections, not only of what Christ is for me, but of what you and I are by and in Christ our Lord? And this we are now.

The last chapter speaks of another thing. Here I must be brief indeed. It is connected with the charge at the end of chapter iv. to love one's brother. The apostle had shown the various displays of divine love, with the falsehood of professing to love God while one hated a brother. But this might elicit the question, who my brother is. We need simplicity, as with our God, so with His children. It is in vain to pretend that this is hard to find out. The Spirit of God does lay down unsparingly and in all their fulness the tests of divine life; but now let the question be raised, who my brother is, and the answer is as plain as possible: "Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

Is it not sweet that after all the fulness of truth had been revealed, after all the display of Christ in glory had been made by the apostle Paul, after the apostle John had set us in presence of the divine nature and eternal life in His person, we have here such a proof of the unchangeable testimony to the Lord Jesus as Christ? What was the truth that Peter and the rest preached at Pentecost? That Jesus is the Christ. What is the truth with which the epistle of John concludes? That Jesus is the Christ. There is no wavering in what is divine.

No doubt there is the unfolding of truth admirably suited to all the varying needs of the church; but when you come to the question after all—who and what is God's child and my brother?—this is what he is: the man that believes that Jesus is the Christ. I grant you it is the very lowest confession that the Holy Ghost could accept; and it would be a very poor thing if the Christian only believed that Jesus was the Christ. If made exclusive, what an unworthy dealing with all the glory of Jesus! But it is to me a blessed thing that the Holy Ghost maintains to the end the value of what He began with; not that more was not made known, but that this abides in freshness and power. No doubt such a confession might be most unintelligent, but at least there is this divine reality in his soul—he *does* believe that Jesus is the Christ. That this should be said at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles we can all understand; but it seems to me that none but God would have thought of insisting on it at the end of the Christian testimony; as if, among the last words that the Holy Ghost uttered, He should say—I have been leading you into all depths and all heights; I have laid open in fresh scriptures the full circle of revealed truth, but I stand to what I began with. Learn the truth, have it developed in your souls, not by the truth developing, but by your growing up into it; but never give up first principles. “Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.” It is not now loving God only, but His children; and thus your love is proved to be divine, and that you really love God Himself. But there is

another query often put: How am I to know that I do love the children of God? Be sure you are in the right path. Here it is—"By this we know that we love the children of God." It is not by gratifying them, or going where they go perhaps, or forcing them where you go. You might be totally mistaken; you might hurry souls, or be drawn away by them yourself. There is no love in either one or other, but there is in this—"when we love God and keep his commandments." If my soul goes out to Him in love, and I show it by unreserved fidelity to His will, there is nothing that is more truly an exercise of love to His children. You may seem to the careless not thinking of them, but you are then loving them best. When you make an object of the children of God, there is no real love. When you are really devoted to God and to His will, you truly love the children of God.

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." The law was a yoke so grievous that neither their fathers nor they were able to bear; but it is not so with the truth of God. The *law* of God was for the punishing as well as testing of the old man; the *word* of God is the food and directory of the new man. But is not the world a great hindrance? No doubt; but there is a something that overcomes the world; and what is this? Faith. But mark, he does not say that "every one who believeth that Jesus is the Christ" overcomes the world. Perhaps you may see some whom you cannot doubt are the real children of God, but they do not overcome the world. What then will enable them to overcome the world? Believing that Jesus is the



Son of God. "The Christ," I might perhaps say, connects Him with the world, with the Jews and the nations He is to govern; "*the Son of God*" connects Him with the Father above the world. Such is the difference. Thus, while holding fast and giving all its value to the confession that Jesus is the Christ of God, I am not to be tied to it. We need a growing sense of what Christ is, and of His glory, in order to resist the downward tendency and the ensnaring power of the world around; and true power over the world is by advancing in the knowledge of Christ. There is no other thing that will wear so well. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

"This is he that came by (διὰ) water and blood." John keeps us fully in the consciousness of our deliverance, but also of our responsibility (*i. e.*, as God's children). "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by (ἐν) water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." This, and no more here, is genuine scripture. A good deal of the two verses is and ought to be left out, if all legitimate authority is heeded by us.

The historical fact, which becomes the basis of the teaching, is that recorded in the Gospel, chap. xix. 34, to which special attention is drawn in the following verse, as recorded by John who saw it; "and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." Here, instead of putting that inspired witness forward, the Spirit takes this place, the greatest of all present witnesses for Christ. The idea of baptism here

is as childish for "the water" as the Lord's Supper is confessed to be for "the blood." Purification, propitiation, and power answer to the three, all flowing to us in or consequent on the death of Christ, the Son of God.

"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath witnessed concerning his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness which God hath witnessed concerning his Son," &c. That is, God bears His testimony in this wondrous triad—the Spirit, the water, and the blood,—three witnesses, yet only one testimony: namely, that there is no life in the first man at all, and that all the blessing is in the Second; that He it is who by His death expiates my sins and purges me, and that the Holy Ghost gives me the joy of both by faith. The Holy Ghost is come not to bear witness to the first man—He has only to convict him of sin—but He testifies to the glory of the Second man, the riches of God's grace in Him, and the efficacy of His work in death for the believer. The church was becoming a ruin; but the believer has the witness in himself. Eternal life is superior to all change; and that he has—even Christ—an object of outward testimony, but also by grace in himself.

This is farther pursued, showing that it is in the Son of God. "He that hath the Son hath life;" and if a man has not the Son of God, it does not matter what else he may have, he has not life. It is in the Son, and only in Him.

Then comes the conclusion. "These things have I

written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God ; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." And there he stops. What is added as the last clause of verse 13 only spoils the verse. It was put in by man. "And this is the confidence,"—it is not a question of life only, but of confidence. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." Thus after life comes confidence, and then the formal close of all follows, as we see in verses 18–21. "And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him." But is there not such a thing as sin? Yes. "If any one see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: concerning that I do not say that he should make request. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death."

Let me make a brief remark on this. The "sin unto death" has nothing to do with eternal death, but with the close of this life. It means not some extraordinarily grievous act, but any sin whatever under special circumstances. For instance, when Ananias and Sapphira lied in presence of the grace that the Holy Ghost was then bestowing on the church, this was "sin unto death." Many a man since then has told a lie which has not been so judged: it was not therefore a "sin unto death." The circumstances of the case have an important influence in modifying it and giving it character. So with any other sin. I mention this because it is there precisely where spiritual power is necessary very often; and all children of God might not see the bearing of a sin

and its peculiar heinousness under a given state of things; but when once it is shown, they can understand it perfectly, because they have the life of Christ in them, and the Holy Ghost too. "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death." We must not think that all sin is unto death; but any sin under peculiar circumstances might be.

And then the last verses sum up the whole matter. "We know that every one that is born of God sinneth not." We saw that to be born of God, to have life, is the great doctrine of the epistle. Here is its character. Such an one does not sin, "but he that has been born of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not." Here we have not merely its character, but its source. The character was Christ; the source is God. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." This is the other sphere. "And we know that the Son of God hath come." Now we have the object given. "The Son of God hath come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols"—objects apt to rise with blinding power between their eyes and Christ.

## APPENDIX ON 1 JOHN V. 7, 8.

It is much to be regretted that excellent persons in all ages have been prone to rest some of their defences of the truth on untenable ground. The danger is that when any of these mistakes in proof are set aside, especially by foes of the truth, not only are such uninformed and incautious disputants apt to fight stubbornly for what is indefensible (*i. e.*, really for self), but others, partly through timidity, partly through ignorance, may dread that the truth itself is imperilled, or be even disposed to stand in doubt of it, confounding the ill-conduct of its advocates with its own impregnable evidence.

Thus one hears with humiliation that any man of learning should seek to shelter the famous passage of the three heavenly witnesses from the reprobation which to say the least an interpolated gloss deserves, and from none so heartily as from pious men jealous for the divine glory of the Lord Jesus. Truth is itself too sacred to admit of giving quarter to that which is spurious, the continued sanction of which is hostile to the authority of the Bible, and in particular to the very point which the suspicious article is meant to support. Let us remember that the study of the authorities on which the Greek Testament rests has greatly developed during the last seventy years, and especially perhaps the last thirty. During this time many fresh manuscripts, some of great value and antiquity, have been brought to light, along with a fuller and more exact collation of all that had been previously known; and this makes an error of the kind less excusable and more painful, if it be in a quarter one respects.

I will not cite, however, from any volume of the day, but



confront a sentence of the famous J. Calvin with the facts, that every intelligent Christian who may want information, but values nothing but the truth, may be enabled to judge for himself. "Since, however, the passage flows better when this clause [from "in heaven" to "in earth" inclusively] is added (!) and as I see that it is found in the best and most approved copies (!! ) I am inclined to receive it as the true reading."\* (Calvin, Translation Soc. Comment. on the Cath. Epistles, p. 257. Edinburgh, 1855.) Then, again, Beza, who ought to have known more of the manuscripts, follows in the wake of his leader. Such statements, I confess, are inexplicable, save on the supposition both of strong prejudice and of surprising inattention to the facts of the case. For so decisive is the testimony of ancient documents (whether manuscripts, versions, or citations by the earliest ecclesiastical writers), that if this portion can be allowed to be scripture *against* their testimony, a fatal blow is inflicted on all certainty of evidence *for* the rest of the New Testament; for all the uncials preserve a dead silence as to it, more than 160 cursives, all the lectionaries, all the ancient versions except the Latin, and even of the Latin more than fifty of the oldest and best copies, and of the rest it is in some cases inserted by a later hand, and with that uncertainty of position which often accompanies an interpolation; while it is not once quoted in any genuine remains of the early Greek or even Latin fathers, even where the occasions seem most to call for it. Its supposed citation by Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, &c. is an illusion.

Hence Erasmus, in his first (1516) and second (1519) editions of the Greek New Testament, so far faithfully followed his MS., and did not print verse 7. It would seem that the

\* "Quia tamen optime fluit contextus si hoc membrum addatur, et video in optimis ac probatissimis fidei codicibus haberi, ego quoque libenter amplector."—*Comm. in loc.* Ed. Genev. p. 74.

Complutensian editors must have boldly translated the Latin version as it stands in the majority of the extant copies; for in the captious attack now before me (*Annotationes Jacobi Lopidis Stunicae contra Erasmus Rot. in defens. translationis N. T.* Complut. 1520), the ablest of them does not pretend to diplomatic authority for the Greek they venture to print, but arraigns the Greek MSS. as corrupted, and backs up the common text of the Vulgate by a quotation from Jerome's (?) *Prologue to the Canonical Epistles*. "Sciendum est hoc loco græcorum codices apertissime esse corruptos: nostros (!) vero veritatem ipsam ut a prima origine traducti sunt continere. Quod ex prologo beati Hieronymi super epistolas canonicas manifeste apparet. Ait enim Quæ si sic ut ab eis digestæ sunt ita quoque ab interpretibus fideliter in latinum vertentur eloquium: nec ambiguitatem legentibus facerent: nec sermonum sese varietas impugnaret illo præcipue loco ubi de unitate trinitatis in prima Ioannis epistola positum legimus. In qua etiam ab infidelibus translatoribus multum erratum esse a fidei veritate comperimus trium tantummodo vocabula hoc est aquae sanguinis et spiritus in ipsa sua editione ponentibus et patris verbique ac spiritus testimonium ommittentibus in quo maxime et fides catholica roboratur et patris et filii et spiritus sancti una divinitatis substantia comprobatur." [I give the quotation as S. cites it, not as it stands in the Benedictine edition of Jerome's works.]

Erasmus had already replied to our notorious countryman, Edward Lee (afterwards Popish archbishop of York), that he did not find in the Greek what was so common in the Latin, and edited accordingly, without expressing approval or blame; that he had at different times seen seven manuscripts, in none of which was anything that answered to the ordinary Vulgate. "Porro quod *Hieronymus* in Præfatione sua testatur hunc locum ab hæreticis depravatum, si velim uti jure mco, possem appellare ab *Hieronymi* auctoritate,

quod *Leus* facit quoties ipsi commodum est." And then he proceeds to expose the exaggeration of Lee, and to propose a conjectural correction in the citation from the prologue. (Desid. Erasmi. Opp. tom. ix., coll. 275, 276.) The truth is, that, by the common consent of the learned, including the Benedictine and other editors of Jerome's writings, this prologue is confessed not to be his production, but of a much later age, and by an inferior hand. To his Spanish critic he answers, "Hic ex auctoritate Hieronymi [which we have just seen is no authority at all, being a forgery], docet Stunica Græcos codices palam esse depravatos. Sed interim ubi dormit codex ille *Rhodiensis*? Porro nos non susceperamus negotium emendandi Græcos codices, sed quod in illis esset, bona fide reddendi." Then, after a long argument intended to neutralize the alleged statement of Jerome's (which Erasmus says, and no wonder, he does not quite understand), he adds, "Cum Stunica meus toties jactet Rhodiensem codicem, cui tantum tribuit auctoritatis, mirum est, non hîc adduxisse illius oraculum, præsertim cum ita fere consentiat cum nostris codicibus, ut videri possit *Lesbia regula*. Veruntamen ne quid dissimulem, repertus est apud Anglos Græcus codex unus, in quo habetur, quod in vulgatis deest. Scriptum est enim hunc ad modum: "Ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, Πατὴρ, Λόγος, καὶ Πνεῦμα [ἅγιον is omitted], καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἐν εἰσίν. καὶ τρεῖς εἰσὶν [οἱ is omitted] μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῇ, πνεῦμα, ὕδωρ, καὶ αἷμα, εἰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, &c. Quanquam hand scio an casu factum sit, ut hoc loco non repetatur, quod est in Græcis nostris, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἐν εἰσίν. Ex hoc igitur codice *Britannico* reposuimus, quod in nostris dicebatur deesse: ne cui sit causa calumniandi. Quanquam et hunc suspicor ad Latinorum codices fuisse castigatum. Posteaquam enim *Græci* concordiam inierunt cum Ecclesia *Romana*, studuerunt et hac in parte cum *Romanis* consentire." (Ib. coll. 351–353.)

Therefore Erasmus in his third edition (1522) inserted verse 7, correcting two errors and supplying the omission at the end of verse 8 in what he called the Cod. Brit. (or Montfort MS.), which probably had the Acts and Epistles added *about this very time* to the Gospels written a few years before, as the Revelation was added by another hand later still—copied, it would seem, from the well-known Leicester MS. Erasmus put in the passage to keep his promise, not because he counted it genuine. Is it too strong to fear that a document so framed, which cannot be traced beyond a friar named Froy, and which came in so opportunely to supply an apparent authority for a Greek text (of which more presently) for the three heavenly witnesses, points to a dishonest source?

It is remarkable too, as Sir I. Newton noticed long ago, that there is a marginal note by the side of this passage in the Complut. Polyglot, as in 1 Cor. xv. 51 and Matt. vi. 13, where the Vulgate is in conflict with the Greek MSS. It is a pity, however, that they were not as explicit on 1 John v. 7 as there, and that they did not cleave to the Greek against the Latin, as they did in rejecting its absurd misrepresentation of 1 Cor. xv. 51. They do indeed cite Thomas Aquinas for 1 John v. 7. “Now to make Thomas thus in a few words do all the work was very artificial” (says Sir I. N., Works, vol. v. p. 522); “and in Spain, where Thomas is of apostolical authority, it might pass for a very judicious and substantial defence of the printed Greek. But to us Thomas Aquinas is no apostle. We are seeking for the authority of Greek manuscripts.”

To what then is the passage due? It is as clear as anything of the sort can be, that what we call verse 7 sprang from Augustine's remarks on what now stands as verse 8, possibly suggested by words of Cyprian to a similar effect. Compare his treatise contra Maximinum Arian. Episcop. l. ii. c. 22. (Tom. viii. col. 725, ed. Ben.) Not that the celebrated

bishop of Hippo cites the passage: what he says is professedly his comment or gloss on the words spirit, water, and blood. "Si vero ea, quae his significata sunt, velimus inquirere, non absurde occurrit ipsa Trinitas, qui unus, solus, verus, summus est Deus, Pater, et Filius et Spiritus sanctus, de quibus verissime dici potuit, *Tres sunt testes, et tres unum sunt*: ut nomine Spiritûs significatum accipiamus Deum Patrem: de ipso quippe adorando loquebatur Dominus ubi ait, *Spiritus est Deus*. (Id. iv. 24.) Nomine autem sanguinis Filium quia, *verbum caro factum est*. (Id. i. 14.) Spiritum sanctum," &c. From the reputation of Augustine this fanciful idea at first gained currency and acceptance, though not always in precisely the original shape; then it seems to have been inserted in the margin as a gloss, till at length, through the ignorance of the transcribers and the clergy in general, it positively crept\* into that text which the Council of Trent, with a temerity as amazing as the lack of knowledge it betrays, pronounced authentic. Hence the danger of demoralising Roman Catholic scholars, some of whom, like R. Simon, were doomed to do a perpetual violence to their conscience, while others, bolder in evil, misdirect every weapon that ingenuity can devise to make the worse appear the better reason. Most, no doubt, intrench themselves with a sort of blind honesty in their last stronghold:

\* Jerome (Epist. cvi. ad Sunn. et Fret.) speaks of a similar course of mistake in copying his own version. "Et miror quomodo e latere Adnotationem nostram nescio quis temerarius scribendam in corpore putaverit, quam nos pro eruditione legentis scripsimus hoc modo," &c. (S. Hieronymi Opp. tom. i. p. 659, Ed. Ben.) But we need not go outside the commonly received text of the Greek New Testament in order to find another instance of what was first a marginal gloss, which at length crept into the text; for such seems to be the history of Acts viii. 37. It is curious that here the conditions are reversed as between Erasmus and the Complutensian editors; for *he* owns the verse wanting in his Greek copies, yet inserts it in deference to the Latin, whilst *they* follow the Greek spite of the Latin.



they believe what the church believes—a pitiful answer where it is a question of revealed truth.

As to internal evidence, it is equally conclusive against the passage foisted in. To bear witness “in heaven” is nonsense; to say “on earth” is superfluous; for earth is the constant scene of testimony. Again, the Father and the Son are the true scriptural correlatives—never the Father and the Word, which last is in correlation with *God*, as we see in John i. Further, since Pentecost the Holy Ghost is distinctively said to be sent down from heaven, and this with a view to the testimony of the gospel, instead of bearing record in heaven with the Father and the Son. Lastly, those who adopt the passage as it stands in the vulgar Latin copies are led to lower the character of the witness borne; for as they of course treat the first three as *divine*, so they regard the last three as *earthly* and *created* witnesses, making the πνεῦμα to be no other than “the created soul of Christ which he breathed forth on the cross, thus witnessing that he was true man.” It would be awkward to make the same Spirit witness both in heaven and on earth.

Objections to the omission of verse 7 have been imagined, as many are aware, for various reasons, all of which seem to me weakness itself. 1. As to the supposed breach of connexion, one has only to read verse 6 in order to be convinced that, on the contrary, the three heavenly witnesses come in most strangely between the water and the blood and the Spirit, of which that verse treated, and verse 8, which pursues the same subject. Internally therefore, as much as externally, verse 7 can only be viewed as an intrusion. The Trinity (fundamental a truth as it is, and without it Christianity is a myth) has no possible link with the context. Christ in death, yet withal life eternal, is the point on which the three witnesses converge with their one testimony. 2. The expression οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, said of the Spirit, the

water, and the blood, is no difficulty without verse 7, because they are evidently *personified*. 3. The wonder is great how Bishop Middleton, the able investigator of the usage of the Greek article, could have so palpably erred as to say that the  $\tau\omicron$  before  $\epsilon\nu$  in verse 8 presupposes  $\epsilon\nu$  in verse 7, and therefore that both verses stand or fall together. Previous reference is only one of the sources of the article.  $\epsilon\nu$ , I grant, might be used of the persons in the Trinity (compare John x. 30 for the Father and the Son); but  $\tau\omicron$   $\epsilon\nu$  is absolutely necessary for the Spirit, the water, and the blood, where identity of nature is not in question but unity of scope. Compare Phil. ii. 2. Other arguments, such as that founded on two editions of the Epistle, or on the influence of Ariens, or on the negligence of transcribers, do not call for a detailed consideration in this place if at all.

Of the state and manner in which the passage is found in the few real or factitious Greek manuscripts that contain it, we may observe, (1) that both in the Græco-Latin Cod. Ottobon. (Vat. 298) and in the Greek Cod. Montfort. (Trin. Coll. Dubl. G. 97) the three heavenly witnesses are set down without the Greek article to any one of them ( $\pi\alpha\tau\eta\rho$ ,  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ ,  $\kappa\alpha\iota$   $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$   $\alpha\gamma\iota\omicron\nu$ )!—a construction which indicates not obscurely the hand of one used to Latin (which has no article) and grossly ignorant of Greek; (2) that the same Cod. Ottobon. gives  $\alpha\pi\omicron$   $\tau\omicron\upsilon$   $\omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon$ , translated in the corresponding Latin by *in celo*, though not  $\alpha\pi\omicron$ , as Scholz has strangely read, but,  $\epsilon\pi\iota$   $\tau\eta\varsigma$   $\gamma\eta\varsigma$ ; (3) that whilst the Cod. Ottobon. represents that the Father, Word, and Holy Spirit ( $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$   $\tau\omicron$   $\epsilon\nu$   $\epsilon\iota\sigma\iota$ ) “are to one purpose,” or agree in one, (translated by itself *unum sunt*!) the Cod. Montfort. says  $\epsilon\nu$   $\epsilon\iota\sigma\iota$ , “are one;” and both (like the Complut. Polyglot) leave out the grand point of the genuine scripture; for neither gives the smallest hint of the revelation that the three witnesses, the Spirit and the water and the blood, conspire in one testimony. I may say

that the Montfort MS. unquestionably *Latinizes* elsewhere in 1 John, and in the immediate context, in opposition to all other Greek manuscripts.

As for the only other documents as yet produced in favour of the amplified text, suffice it to say that the Codex Ravianus of Berlin is now (as well as one of those at Wolfenbüttel) acknowledged to be a forgery, copying the very characters (in themselves peculiar) of the Complutensian Polyglot, and even repeating some of its misprints! That which Scholz cited as 173 in his list is the Codex Regius Neapolitanus, which in the text really confirms the truth, but adds on the margin in more recent characters the disputed clause. Here only, as compared with Codd. Ottobon. and Montfort., the article is duly inserted; but there is this unfortunate flaw in its value, that while the manuscript was written in the eleventh century, the addition cannot claim a higher antiquity than the sixteenth, if indeed so high. Such evidence as this might be easily multiplied by dishonest hands; but the weight of it all would be nil.

It may be worth while to mention, as corroborating the testimony to the source of this mistake, not without fraud, that its earliest known occurrence in Greek is in the Greek version of the Acts of the fourth Lateran Council (in 1215), where it stands thus: *ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν οὐρανῷ ὁ πατὴρ, λόγος, καὶ πνεῦμα ἅγιον· καὶ τοῦτοι (sic!) οἱ τρεῖς ἐν εἰσίν. εὐθύς τε προστίθησι . . . καθὼς ἐν τισὶ κώδεξιν (sic! = ἀντιγράφοις) εὐρίσκεται.* So the passage stands both in Hardouin's Collection (tom. vii. p. 18) and in Mansi's (tom. xxii. p. 984). I can hardly doubt that this it was which encouraged the Complutensian editors to venture on their daring importation into the Greek New Testament of a passage which, however well meant doctrinally, bears the indelible trace of human infirmity, even after Stunica and his companions did their best to make decent Greek of it by

inserting τῷ before οὐρανῷ, ὁ before λόγος, and τὸ before (not πν. but) ἅγιον πνεῦμα,\* correcting also τοῦτοι, which was no doubt a blunder for οὔτοι. But they went a little too far when they changed ἐν into εἰς τὸ ἐν after the first three, and left out εἰς τὸ ἐν after τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἶμα where these words beyond controversy ought to be. No doubt they were guided by Latin copies made since Th. Aquinas' day and that council. They refer in their marginal note to the perverse doctrine of Joachim on the Trinity, which was condemned at this very council of the Lateran.

If we turn to Thomas Aquinas, as referred to, the erroneous statement is sufficiently startling. He cites verse 7 as it stands in the later Latin copies, and reasons on the heterodoxy of Joachim, who applied the unity there, not to essence, but to affection and consent. Then, quoting verse 8, he says, "In quibusdam Libris attexitur: *et hi tres unum sunt*; sed hoc in veris exemplaribus non habetur (!), sed in quibusdam Libris dicitur esse appositum ab hæreticis Arianis ad pervertendum intellectum sanum auctoritatis præmissæ de unitate essentiali trium personarum (!!)."

(Divi Thomæ Aquinatis. Opera, tom. viii., p. 83, Venetiis, 1776.) This probably accounts for the omission of the clause that concludes verse 8 in the Complutensian Polyglot, as well as in some of the Greek copies manufactured after the fourth Lateran Council. Some excuse may be allowed for one like the "angelic doctor," who was unacquainted with the Greek scriptures; but why then did *he* dogmatise on so serious a subject? Total ignorance is the only conceivable palliation of his assertions, which are notoriously opposed to truth.

\* Hence Calecas in the fourteenth century, and Bryennius in the fifteenth, as Bishop Marsh noticed, being native Greeks, and feeling the deficiency of the Lateran Acts in Greek, wrote ὁ λόγος καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. The copyist of the Montfort MS. omitted the article even before πατήρ, not to speak of the other words which require it.

And what can one think of the deliberate sanction given to all this by Cardinal Ximenes and his editors in the renowned Polyglot of Alcalá? Are we to shelter them also under such a plea? If not, what then?

Again, what can one judge of the knowledge or the moral integrity of keeping up such a note to 1 John v. 7 in modern reprints of Jerome's works (*e.g.* the Abbé Migne's, Paris, 1845) as the following? "Cæterum nota sunt pro ejus versiculi germanitate testimonia Patrum Africanorum, Tertulliani, Cypriani, Eugenii, Fulgentii, Vigilii, Victoris, e[t] quatuorcentum Episcoporum in fidei professione, quam Vandalorum regi obtulerunt. Major omni exceptione est Cassiodorus," &c. (*Patrologiæ Curs.*, tom. xxix., coll. 846.) Not to speak of the silence of the Greek fathers on a question of the Greek text, it has been proved repeatedly and minutely that not one of these could have read the passage in the Greek as it now appears in the Vulgate. All that can be fairly drawn from Victor Vitensis' story of the symbol of faith presented by the African bishops to Hunneric is that the three heavenly witnesses must have been then read in their Latin copies. But it is certainly not so in the oldest and best Latin manuscripts that are extant, as all intelligent Romanists must know.



## VIII.

### THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLES OF JOHN, AND JUDE.

THERE is this peculiarity about the second Epistle of John, that it alone of all the inspired communications is directly addressed to a woman, and not this only but also to her children. There are certainly good but special reasons for a course so exceptional. We know how much the word of God, not to speak of every spiritual instinct, would lead a Christian woman however gifted to seek a place of retirement and of unobtrusive service.

We feel how all that is blessed of God's grace, and I may add of God's gift, is only so much the more set off when woman, while thoroughly using whatever the grace of the Lord entrusts to her, understands nevertheless the place in which it has pleased Him to put her here below. Yet here we have one of the most stringent epistles the Holy Ghost ever wrote addressed to a woman—the elect lady—and to her children, as the immediate objects of it,—not to an extraordinary apostolic commissioner, nor an elder, nor an assembly, still less an assembly with bishops and deacons. Why so? Because there was a question before the Holy Ghost of such unspeakable urgency and magnitude that all considera-

tions must give way to it. God so ordered things that the Epistle should be sent to a woman originally, for the very purpose of showing that, whatever may be the ordinary ways of God in His church, there are occasions and seasons in which the very foundation of His grace and of His moral glory must be maintained at all cost. Wherever this is the case, no excuse can be tolerated on the score of sex or youth. Do not tell me that it is only a child or a woman. If Christ is in the question, all else must give way. Nor is this a sacrifice but real gain.

What has been remarked may serve to show us the all-absorbing consequence of what the Holy Ghost here takes in hand. Christ was undermined by those who held His name. It was a question of a true or of a false Christ. Sex was nothing now, youth not more to be considered—all very important when things flow on regularly and in their ordinary channels. We all know how unbecoming it would be for either the one or the other to be put forward, still more to put themselves there; but the Holy Ghost addresses Himself to them here. And we shall see, as is always the case, that what might seem an anomaly in the word of God, when properly looked into, will prove to be full of grave instruction for all our souls. No other conceivable address would have been so appropriate for the second Epistle of John.

Had the present been written in general terms, like the first Epistle, much would have been lost; just as, on the other hand, I could scarcely, for my own part, imagine the first Epistle written to the elect lady and her children. All is precisely as it should be. There

we find points of universal interest to the children of God, and it is a question of addressing all this family, fathers, young men, and babes. But here, where the tide of evil was now setting in strongly, where searching enquiries must be on foot, where not the ordinary evils only were increasing in an ever and rapidly accumulating volume, but the deepest peril for the basis of all our hopes, the warning is addressed fittingly both to the family and to individuals. Where the first Epistle noticed these things in a general way to all, here we come to greater precision in the evil, and here too we have to do with particular persons.

How often one has heard it urged that it is not for a woman to take upon herself to judge, and that no wise man can mean to say that these are questions for children—that they are points of delicacy which most of all require deep theological knowledge and mature judgment; and would you expect the assembly of God to judge such matters? But the Holy Ghost here appeals to a woman and her children, and they are bound to judge; if they do not, Christ is set at nought for their own ease. It was now a question of Christ—the Christ of God. We shall see all this more clearly as we proceed. I am only now endeavouring to show the beautiful appropriateness of that which to a superficial eye might seem somewhat out of order in the address of this Epistle. “The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.”

This is another very characteristic point in the second Epistle of John. Indeed it runs all through John. In the Gospel, as we know, Christ Himself is set forth

expressly as the truth ; and then his Epistles, as we have seen and may yet see, abound in the same tenacity to what was revealed by and in Christ. Here we find it still. It is interwoven into the very salutation of the epistle—"The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth." At once the issue is understood. What was at stake is here before the mind of those who read so remarkable an address. If Mary, about to become the mother of Jesus, might wonder at the singularity of the angel's salutation, assuredly this was meant to search the conscience and stir the souls of the elect lady and her children, when an inspired apostle addresses to them a communication of unwonted solemnity. How great the grace of Christ, and infinite the condescension, that shows how precious is every believer to Him ! We find nothing like this in any of the preceding epistles, as to the Galatians or the Romans, the Corinthians or the Ephesians, yet I do affirm that this is precisely what was wanted here. It was a more fundamental question, and the error more fatal. It was no defence or assertion of justification by faith. John is not setting forth the proper order of the assembly of God ; nor is he leading the saint into the heavenly privileges of the individual or the body. Christ was in question or nothing. Nothing, did I say ? Worse than nothing. It was either the Christ of God in all His divine glory, or the greatest evil into which a man can possibly be plunged by the enemy. It was, in short, war to the knife—the great controversy between Christ and antichrist. Solemn to think and say, the self-same crisis affects every soul now present !

I remember years ago reading a book by a celebrated

character, who has now passed away from the scene, in which he dared to raise the question whether there was any particular sign in 2 or 3 John,\* why they should be accepted as divinely inspired, more than such compositions as the pastoral letters of Ignatius. It was not that the writer took the place of being an infidel: in fact he was Rector of the English College at Rome, and since a Cardinal in this country. This dreadful feature of ecclesiasticism is not so uncommon to find; namely, an infidel argument under the cowl of a monk or in the lips of their most learned professors. Therefore one must not be surprised if one ever so eminent ecclesiastically gave the plainest evidence that he had no faith in the word of God, that he did not participate in its power. Thus the strongest form of the assertion of church authority may really betray under its robes no better than vulgar infidelity. He asked† how you

\* "I would ask you, for instance, how you would demonstrate (I will not speak now of the books of the Old Testament; I will take that for granted, from the historical evidence, that our Saviour and His apostles received them as sufficient to satisfy you with regard to them; but Christians are more particularly interested in the New Testament) how you would demonstrate from internal facts the inspiration of the second and third Epistles of St. John, finding in them neither a prophecy nor any thing else that could not have been written by a very holy and pious man, without any aid from inspiration. In some, indeed, of the Epistles of St. Paul you will find it exceedingly difficult to discover passages so decidedly proving a divine assistance in him who wrote them as to satisfy you that they were inspired."—*Lectures* (p. 28) *on the Doctrines and Practices of the Roman Catholic Church*, &c. By the Rev. Nicholas Wiseman, D.D., &c. London: Hodson, Fleet Street. 1836.

† In the corrected edition of this lecture I find, "What internal mark of inspiration can we discover in the third epistle of St. John to show that the inspiration *sometimes* must have been granted here? *Is there anything in that epistle which a good and pious pastor of the pri-*



would demonstrate from internal facts the inspiration of the second and third Epistles of St. John, finding in them neither a prophecy nor *anything else which could not have been written by a very holy and pious man, without any aid whatsoever from inspiration!* The same poisonous argument taints in a still baser and more audacious form Dr. Milner's "End of Controversy:" indeed it pervades Romanism as a whole, and proves its essentially infidel character.

I think, my brethren, that our experience might supply ample ground for an answer, though probably not of such a character as would satisfy one who could make such an objection. There is a day coming when judgment will decide; but conscience, acted upon by the Holy Ghost, can form a conviction now—not of course infallibly, for God alone is or can be infallible—but adequately for the need of the soul. I do say, that the loss would have been immense if we had not had even these two Epistles, putting the matter on no higher ground than this. I need not say that I refuse to treat a question of scripture on a mere ground of utility. Still, we are certain that God has written nothing in vain; and if in a grave crisis of late any one scripture was needed and must have been missed, without which we might have found ourselves at a loss how to act firmly under as trying circumstances as ever befell any soul in this room, or any other, it would have been precisely the second Epistle of John.

*mitive ages might not have written ? anything superior (!) in sentiment or doctrine (!!) to what an Ignatius or a Polycarp might have indited?"* (Lect. ii. p. 38, ed. 1836.) Truly "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

The apostle then lets them know that he loved them all in the truth; for a believer, young or old, man, woman, or child, is best loved just for the sake of the truth. He that departs from the truth, what is he? A rebel. But they that walk in the truth, even were they children or ever so lowly, are precious to God; and His Spirit waits on such, and writes to them, and lays on them to decide before God, in their own sphere of duty, this most grave question: "Is my soul in communion with God about His own Son? Whatever may be the reputation of others, whatever my own weakness and call to walk humbly, do I feel that the one thing which is to determine all others for me is the truth, the truth of Christ Himself?" If it be so, all else will in the main be right. Hence John writes to this effect to the elect lady, whom he loved in truth, and to her children. Nor was this affection of a personal or circumstantial character: "Whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth." The revelation of God in Christ does, by the Holy Spirit, bind together in love all who know the truth. It was on account of the truth that he now wrote—as it is said, "for the truth's sake."

How unweariedly he puts forward that which was now to test them severally! (verse 2.) "For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. Grace be with you, mercy and peace." As has been often and truly remarked, where individuals are thus before the mind of the Spirit of God, the need of "mercy" is supposed and shown. "From God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love"—an expression found, as

far as I remember, nowhere else. It was just in its right place here. Satan was undermining the glory of "the Son of the Father." But if He be not this, how can I go to Him? How rest my soul, my all, on Him? How can God look to Him and His work for every soul that is brought to Himself?

Hence the apostle's source of joy. "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father." Walking in truth is the result of having the truth. The truth produces truthfulness. The man who has not got the truth cannot possibly walk in truth, and will not long wear the semblance of it. To walk thus was the effect of the truth itself known: they walked in truth, "according as we received commandment from the Father."

"And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another." It was the old, but ever new word: old, because it was manifested in Christ Himself; new, because it is true in us as in Him. Divine love flows from love, and reproduces itself in all who know Christ the truth. But what is love? "And this is love:" not independency of each other, not agreeing to differ, or any of those inventions of men which are not only a departure from the truth, but in point of fact morally evil and injurious. "This is love, that we walk after his commandments." You cannot separate it from Christ; you cannot separate it from obedience. It is love in exercise, and it is also love that is communicated by faith in Jesus. "This is the commandment, That, as

ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it."

Now he gives the reason why he writes thus solemnly to this lady and her children. "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." "Many deceivers are entered into the world;" and therefore it is needful, yea imperative, to press the claims of the truth of God. "Who confess not Jesus Christ coming in the flesh." It is put here rather differently from its shape in the first Epistle. There the allusion was to the fact, but this as stamping a permanent character on Christ—the Christ that came. Here it is not so much a question of His having come, but, as it seems to me, indicating if possible a deeper shade of infidelity. No doubt the same persons are referred to, but it would seem as having developed their infidelity rather more. For there is the rejection not only of the fact, but even of its possibility. They conceived the thought that in some way or another it was derogatory to Him. They denied, some His deity, some His humanity.

In commenting on 1 John iv., I have already remarked that "Jesus Christ come in the flesh" supposes neither His deity alone, nor His humanity only, but both. There is no propriety in the expression, it appears to me, unless it means both united in the same person. In point of fact it is the veering to one side or the other—choosing a part of the truth of Christ so as to set aside the rest—that is so fruitful a source of error here and everywhere, though here most fatally. "This is the deceiver and the antichrist." It is far

worse than bringing in division and offence, bad as these are; nay, it is far more serious than even the undermining of morality, ruinous as this must be. To sap or corrupt morality is no doubt to destroy oneself, and perhaps often others; but this is to defame and degrade Christ, the Son of the Father. This, then, is a bolder effort of Satan, and therefore John calls one guilty of it not only "the deceiver" (every false teacher is more or less a deceiver), but in this case also "the antichrist."

Hence he calls them to look at home diligently lest they should stray. For God alone keeps the soul, and this by and in the truth. "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought," (of which the apostles had been the instrument,) "but that we receive a full reward."

Then he lays down the great principle in verse 9:—"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." It is a larger principle than simply denying Christ coming in the flesh. No matter where it is, or how it is, if you overthrow the person of Christ, you transgress the doctrine of Christ. In the seventh verse we had a particular case; but from it the Spirit of God rises up to this statement of truth which meets every such case. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ" (that is, in the teaching which the Holy Ghost has given in His word about Christ, not about His work, but about His person), "hath not God" in any sense or measure, now that Christ is preached.

The greatest error about His work is not so directly



fatal to the soul, because it does not so immediately assail the personal glory of the Lord Jesus. Here it is the doctrine of Christ Himself; and as one must beware of straying at first, let him also beware of not continuing in the doctrine of Christ. A man might have professed His name, and gone on some time with the assembly of God, accepted as a believer, or even a teacher; but if he does not abide in the truth of Christ, it does not signify what he may have been, it matters not in the least how much he may seemingly have been blessed, it is all over with him if he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, and it becomes a necessity, not merely for the safety of oneself and others, but for God's glory, which is concerned here more sensitively than anywhere else. "Who-soever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God."

It might be said that at any rate a man might have the truth of the Old Testament, as there were such before Christ was manifested in the world; and if the person fails to enter into all the truth that Christianity has told out, can he be worse off than those who lived and died before Jesus came? The answer is that such special pleading is all in vain; he is incomparably guiltier and worse off, because now the standard is not what God once gave, but what He is giving now in a Christ fully revealed. Therefore it will not do to talk of what others knew not. This is an important practical criterion; because, although not to the same extent, it does meet the difficulty which people constantly allege founded on what their forefathers did—possibly excellent men—two or three hundred years ago. What is that to the present moment? If God by His Spirit causes His

truth to reach us in a form and power suited to this day, if God brings it home more clearly on this point or that, these are the things which put the soul under a fresh responsibility; and this seems indicated in the form in which the Spirit of God deals with the error here. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." It is not only that he lacks the blessedness of the Christian revelation, but he has not God—he has no part nor lot with God at all. The Old Testament saints had God variously revealed. They received His word and rejoiced, according to the measure of their faith, in the truth as God then made it known to them. But now that Christ is come, now that the Holy Ghost has been sent down, now that the unfolding of Christ's personal glory, of His exaltation, and of the infinite grace of His work, has been proclaimed, it is altogether hopeless to seek a cover of present unbelief under the ignorance of past years. It is the present unfolding of God's mind that puts every soul to the test. Therefore not to accept it, and not to abide in it when it is received, to go back from it or to transgress, swerving to one side or the other, or abandoning it, comes to the same substantial sin and ruin.

On the other hand, here is the comfort for the elect lady and her children, and for any one else who cleaves to the truth. "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." There is great blessedness in thus abiding, brethren; it is a grand thing not to be easily shaken, not to be moved to and fro by every wind of doctrine, more particularly in anything about Christ. Beware of this. Weigh seriously every thought, no matter from whom it may come—any word

that even seems to turn you away from what you have, and to weaken the assurance you have from God. Never allow yourself to be shaken from old truth, if indeed you have it and know it. At the same time always hold your soul open for more; and take care that you do not confound notions you have gathered (perhaps from tradition, possibly from your own mind) with the truth of Christ, lest, when the tradition is touched, you may begin to yield to the spirit of unbelief, and either give up truth you used (or seemed at least) to hold, or burst out against the truth of God in others who know it better than yourself.

In these things assuredly we need to have the promised guidance of the Holy Ghost. We cannot start or go on without it, nor would we do so even if we could. It is the very blessedness of our souls to be kept by so holy a guide and in safe companionship. But then, just as in our ordinary walk, if we live in the Spirit, we must walk in the Spirit; so also, if we have been taught of the Spirit, we must go forward and persevere in the Spirit. This does not in the smallest degree clash with "abiding." The only way to be kept is holding fast what God has really taught us, yet using this as the groundwork for making progress. Such is the true way to "abide." "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." Now that the doctrine of Christ is fully brought out in the word of God, the more sure it is that there is nothing to add. Impossible to discover a truth of God that is not already in the Bible. But there is not a little to learn which, I am persuaded, is there already. We must not confound these two things. Who would

assume that you and I know all that is in the Bible? If then a line of truth be pointed out anywhere in scripture, do not calumniously pretend that it is some further development, because you have been so dull as not to see it. It is the very point of faith to know that as God Himself is infinite, so His word contains boundless riches for us. There is that which may by the Holy Ghost be always apprehended more and more fully; and yet after all it is the same holy deposit as was given to the Christian from the beginning.

The apostle now comes to the practical consequence. He has laid down the principle in the ninth verse: now comes the practice. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." Mark how it is put. It is not—bring not the true humanity, or the proper Deity; because Satan might change the doctrine somewhat, so as to save appearances for the simple. Therefore it would not do merely to specify some one particular form of error, because then the devil would have only to evade that form, and there would be no resource. But here it stands firm yet comprehensive: if a man come to you, and does not bring this doctrine (that is, the doctrine of Christ), do not you receive him. No matter what may be the particular manner in which the enemy has warped his soul, and through him dishonoured Christ; no matter what may be the peculiar nature of the false doctrine,—if a man come to you, and bring not the divinely revealed doctrine, the Holy Ghost's teaching of Christ in the written word,—"receive him not into your house, neither bid him greeting."

That is to say, do not bid him a common salutation. There is nothing about "God speed" in the word (*χαίρειν*), though "good speed" might be tolerable. The stronger terms are merely put in by the English translators. It was the ordinary form of courteous greeting every day.

This is to my mind a serious thought. Do you think, my brethren, that we all follow this out as we ought? Are we not conscious of shrinking from the cost, and of a fear if not anxiety lest we should be counted uncourteous? I can speak for one certainly; and I doubt much whether in general we are sufficiently alive to the solemnity of what Satan is always pursuing. More particularly let me add, that we stand in a position, failure in which tends to expose all God's children to the efforts of the enemy. There are none, I presume, whom he would so much desire to drag into the mire, and thus defile the name of Jesus.

If then such an one come, of course without the doctrine, yet taking the ground of truth, you are to receive him not. Where? To the Lord's table? No; this could not have been said to the elect lady and her children. The exhortation is quite independent of public fellowship. The question of the Lord's table is not even raised. They are not even to receive him into their private house, nor to accost him with common greeting. Why this most severe and peremptory exclusion? "For he that biddeth him greeting" (not so much as receiving him into the house, but interchanging words of courtesy with such a man, knowingly, of course, and deliberately) "is a partaker of his evil deeds." You, as a confessor of Christ, put your sanction on this denier of Christ. You could not do worse except deny



Christ yourself ; indeed, in a certain sense you are more guilty than even if you were drawn for a time into the abominable thing yourself, because then you would be honestly acting out what you had been deceived by Satan into believing ; but the more you hold the true Christ, if you tamper with those who do not, the more shameless you are in unfaithfulness to Christ.

To some this may seem strong ; but who has written it ? who urges it ? Is it a man without God ? Is it not the Spirit of God who charges us in the name of the Lord Jesus thus sensitively to feel for the truth of Christ ? Let us not be deaf to such a claim from such a person. Let us not reserve our warm feelings for our friends, and leave only indifference for the name of Jesus. He that greets kindly the man that brings not the doctrine of Christ is a traitor to Christ.

Let me here repeat that it is not "God speed," for this might give a false idea. It sounds as if we were wishing him well in his work. This would be commonly inferred by one unaccustomed to read the language of the Holy Ghost. But it conveys nothing of the sort—merely a Greek "good morning"—what would pass in the current language of the day among one's fellows.

He then who has anything to say to the defamer of Christ which could be fairly interpreted as a sanction, let it be ever so small, becomes a partaker of his evil deeds. It is not a question of being a partner in his evil doctrine. The elect lady and her children were of course believed to hold sound doctrine ; but they are here peremptorily called to refuse any measure of countenance to one who did not bring the doctrine of Christ—not only not to receive him into the house, but not

to salute him outside it. It was a part of the loyalty they owed to Christ.

John concludes thus : " Having many things to write to you, I would not with paper and ink : but I hope to come to you, and speak mouth to mouth, that your joy may be full. The children of thine elect sister greet thee." There was hearty love, but it was only in the truth, of which Christ alone is the test and obedience the effect.

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN again calls us to weigh the Lord's admirable wisdom in its address,—“The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius,”—as we have, I trust, been satisfied of the same in the second Epistle's address to “the elect lady and her children.” Without the third Epistle we should have an immense loss ; for here too we may meet the unbelieving slight already noticed in a scribe of this age by a direct assertion of its living value. A precious and needed supplement is supplied especially for these evil days. If we had only the second without the third Epistle of John, we should have the negative side without the positive—the evil warned against rather than the good enforced. Both are most needful. What would have been the effect of the second Epistle of John, if that alone of the two had been ours at the present moment ? I have sought to show how admirable it is—matchless for its own purpose—and impossible to supply its place from any other part of scripture, yet in thorough accordance with it all. It is admitted that the principle of the Epistle is found all through the New Testament ; but the strength of the

application, the incisive edge of its holy jealousy for Christ, is only to be found there. Yet, supposing we had not the third of John, what would be the too sure effect? I am persuaded we should be in danger of becoming painfully narrow; we should be in constant dread of an antichrist in those that surrounded us; we should do little but search with suspicion, lest each new comer to the house should not bring the doctrine of Christ.

Now we are not called to be thus on the watch for another's evil. We ought never to be suspicious. It is not faith, but flesh that expects iniquity. On the other hand, if a man comes and does not bring the doctrine of Christ, it is not to be branded as suspicion or want of love if one regard him as antichrist. It is according to the truth we love, and is the wisdom that comes from above; nay, it is real obedience and loyalty to Christ. But to allow doubts and questions of one who neither in himself nor in his associations makes light of Christ's glory is inexcusable. Here comes one bearing the Lord's name, not without a Barnabas who knows and can commend him: to indulge in surmises, if without the least evidence of this or that about him, is clearly not according to Christ. It is here, I think, that we may learn more of the value and special function of this third Epistle of John, which is as decided in the cherishing of warm affections towards the faithful servants of the Lord, as the second Epistle was peremptory in its warning against the allowance of the profession of Christ's name, to shut our eyes to the fact that there are men who abuse that name to overthrow His person and truth.

The third Epistle accordingly is not addressed to a lady and her children. This would not suit its object. Too often, as we know, ladies and their children want no exhortation to go forth with sufficiently warm affection after preachers. This is notorious. There are few more common snares in the church of God than the undue influence which some exercise, if they do not seek, over females and young people. I do not speak of such as seek the conversion of souls, but of those whose zeal goes forth in unedifying questions which form parties, chiefly through the medium of women and children. Undoubtedly this has always been the case. If you search through the history of the church, you will invariably find that where men have wrong purposes in view, they do not seek intelligent men,—those who can take and keep their ground, still less those to whom God has given grace as faithful servants of independent judgment: they shrink from these, and avoid a conference which might be profitable, getting into holes and corners, where they can at leisure indoctrinate their little coteries with the doctrines that they bring in privily.

Of all this and more we have had sorrowful experience. It is not a thing we have merely read about others in bygone days. We have seen and known it ourselves: its grief we have bitterly felt; and we ought to mention this snare, and could not refrain, if indeed we have love for the children of God and jealousy for the glory of Christ. Undoubtedly then it remains true that there is the solemn fact of Satan's enmity, and of his using those who bear the name of Christ to overthrow His glory, as far as he can. It is

the Holy Ghost who warns of this, though the word and experience prove how mighty He is in behalf of the love and glory of Christ. For indeed there are men faithful and true to that name; and we are as much bound to go forth with loving desire and succour, to cheer and help them in every way, showing honour to them, as again we are responsible that no circumstances, no past reputation, no present amiability, no ties of flesh and blood, no consideration of any human sort, shall weaken our solemn separation from and abhorrence of that which overthrows Jesus.

This third Epistle then is addressed to Gaius—no doubt a truly hospitable and gracious man. We all know too well that men are apt to be somewhat selfish. Women, as we must be aware, are even by nature characterised by affection. Men, if they have what one looks for from them, ought to have a little judgment; but then their judgment may be warped by selfishness, though no doubt this may be often concealed, perhaps from themselves, by pleas of prudence and so forth. Women, as a class, have warmer and quicker affections.

Here then the wisdom of God is very observable. The kindest of men require to be stirred up, and need to be exhorted strongly as to what they owe to those who go forth in the name of the Lord Jesus. With women this is hardly to be pressed. On the contrary, as a general rule, they rather call for a little cooling down. But as for men, I have rarely seen the man that was not in want of an occasional admonition or encouragement in this kind of love. Do we not recognize in a new form the wisdom of our God? “The elder unto the well-



beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." He was already a large-hearted man, but he was none the worse for being somewhat cheered on. There is a danger of being disheartened in these labours of love. There are many difficulties and many disappointments, and there is no man who may not sometimes need a word from God to keep his courage up, and his confidence in the Lord, that the springs of his love may flow fresh and strong.

Here we have the fact that to the "well-beloved Gaius" the apostle writes with this intent. He loved him also in the truth. Whether it was the elect lady and her children, or the well-beloved Gaius, it is all the same thing. It was not because of his hospitality, but "whom I love in the truth." No doubt the apostle did much value his generosity and care; but even in matters wholly different from those of his second Epistle, the distinguishing feature which presses on his soul was this:—"whom I love in the truth." "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." He was not indifferent even as to the bodily well-being of Gaius. The Holy Ghost thus inspires him to write it. It is not a private letter, nor was it an uninspired codicil added to what was inspired; but here it stands in a genuine apostolic epistle, written by John the elder to his brother. He wished that he might prosper and be in health, even as his soul prospered. "For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." It was sweet to the apostle to hear such a

testimony to the steadfastness of Gaius in the truth, as it was to hear of all he loved.

“Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and this\* strangers.” The common text and our English version seem a little peculiar in the phraseology here, conveying the idea that these strangers were not brethren. This clearly was not the intention. He has before his mind brethren that were strangers. It was not merely brethren that lived in the place where Gaius was: this might be a manifest token of happy friendship. But there was a greater proof of love and hospitality in the kindness he practised to stranger brethren, to Christians whom he did not know. “Which have borne witness of thy love before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey worthily of God, thou shalt do well: for on account of the name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to take up such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.”

This was a special claim on brethren. They did not throw themselves on man, on the world, on nature, but on Christ only. It was for His name's sake they went forth. They looked nowhere else; and the apostle says, “We therefore ought to take up such”—not ye but “*we*.” How beautifully he who lay on Jesus' bosom puts himself along with Gaius! Had the apostle been placed in the same circumstances as Gaius, no doubt he would have done so; but his place as apostle did not absolve him from the practical manifestation of love to servants of the Lord who might be in a position

\* The reading of the most ancient and best MSS. and Versions is *τοῦτο* (and not as in Text. Rec. *εἰς τοὺς*) ξ.

altogether different from his own. That this is the case is most evident, because in the verse but one before he says "thou;" in the verse after he says "I." Unquestionably then, when he changes the "thou" either to "we" or to "I," he means what he says.

Thus we find that if there was sorrow expressed in the second Epistle at finding the deceivers and the anti-christ seeking an entrance among the simple, in the third Epistle there is the joy of welcoming these faithful brethren who went forth for Christ, and his loving hospitable heart who is thus praised by the Holy Ghost, and his name indelibly recorded in the scriptures of truth with theirs as fellow-labourers.

But the bright picture has its shade. "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

We have another evil designated very clearly here. Diotrephes is the scriptural example of the clerical tribe, as contra-distinguished from the ministry of Christ. There is no service, because there is no love. He is the representative of the spirit which opposes the free action of the Holy Ghost, setting itself even against apostolical authority in order to gain or maintain his own individual pre-eminence. Self-importance, jealousy of those over us, impatience of others equally called to serve, scorn of the assembly, yet sometimes humouring the least worthy for its own ends—such are the characteristics of clericalism.

I do not mean in clergymen only; for there are men of God incomparably better than their position tends to make them; as on the other hand this evil thing is nowhere so offensive as where the truth that is owned wholly condemns it.

If Diotrephes had been called to serve the Lord, of which there is little appearance, were there not hundreds and thousands not less truly called to the same work as servants of Christ by a title from Christ not less real than what he held himself? Was he not bound to respect the title of others? You cannot plead the title of Christ for yourself without maintaining the authority of Christ for another. He who does so honestly and truly could not possibly claim an exclusive title. This was precisely what Diotrephes did, and it is the distinctive point of the clerical system. It is not a question of ministry, nor even of what people call "stated ministry." Who doubts stated ministry? At the same time who can deny that God uses servants of His who are not stated? I believe that He maintains His own title in the church of God to raise a man up to say a word, and it may be an important word, who might not be called on to speak again,—only used for a particular purpose. God of old reserved such a right, and certainly He has not given it up now: no doubt there is a variety of ways in which He employs those who may not have any well defined place in the church of God. To abolish all these to a dead level for himself to lead and govern was the unchecked desire of Diotrephes. It is nothing more, if not less, than we often see now. Supposing persons have large gifts, the more can they afford to give the fullest scope to the lesser gifts; nor is there

any surer sign of weakness in one's work than any unwillingness to accredit the work of others. He that values his own call on the Lord's part to serve Him is bound by all means to hold in His name the door open for every one that is called to labour. But so Diotrephes did not. Did he profess to desire only what edified most, and so set himself against lesser gifts? He dared to rise up against the apostle himself. The truth is, he cared for himself, and loved to have the pre-eminence. We have no reason to gather that he loved anything or anybody else. Such was the man who had ventured to oppose John; and, as we see, the apostle says he would remember him. The Lord did not forget it.

But he could not close the Epistle with anything so painful. Turning to a happier theme, he says, "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God."

How the key-note of the first Epistle is heard right through the last! If there were self-exalting men with and without gift, office, or influence, others there are of a different mind. "Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true."

Then with the salutation he closes. "I had many things to write to thee, but I wish not with ink and pen to write to thee: but I hope to see thee, and we will speak mouth to mouth soon. Peace be to thee. The friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name." There are minute differences of interest between this conclusion and that of the second Epistle, but I avoid details and pass on.



We enter now on the last of those letters as they stand in the common Bible, THE EPISTLE OF JUDE. I will take this opportunity of instituting briefly a comparison with part of the second Epistle of Peter, which, you may remember, I passed over with a partial notice when discoursing on that subject. Doubts have been entertained, as most are aware, by men of some learning. From their similarity in various ways they have conceived that Peter must have borrowed from Judas or Judas from Peter; and that, in point of fact, if one is inspired, the other cannot be.

Brethren, this sort of thought and speech is the result of nothing but unbelieving speculation. And I will go even farther (for it is a serious thing thus to treat scripture): I say that the speculation is as shallow as it is unbelieving. Although no doubt there are those who consider themselves to show their superior wisdom by their doubts, I must take the liberty of saying that to dispute the inspiration of either 2 Peter or Judas demonstrates their ignorance of both. I do not mean at all to affirm that those guilty of such license are ignorant on every subject. Far from it. A person drawn into such views may be possessed of large and superior information in what has occupied his life, and there may be even certain portions of the word of God in which he is really taught of the Spirit of God. But for all that these doubts are as unfounded as they are dangerous, and dishonouring to the Holy Ghost. I am aware that some names of great weight among Protestants, as well as others quite opposed in position, have yielded to these unworthy questionings of scripture. To this I refer that those who are present may understand that it

is not for want of examining their objections, and weighing well what they say against the truth, that I have ventured to express a severe judgment on their opinion.

I hope to show that Judas has not borrowed from Peter any more than Peter from Judas, but that both were inspired men, who wrote in the direct order and power of the Holy Spirit. I do not at all mean to imply by this that one did not write before the other, and that one may not have read what the other wrote. Whether this were so or not matters little really to the question. It is plain and demonstrable that the Spirit of God, if one did know of the other's communication, has taken good care, while giving a great deal that is common to both, to give points of difference of the most essential kind. In point of fact, therefore, the criticism that comes to the conclusion that the one is borrowed from the other simply betrays its own blind incompetence. The differences are as striking at least as the resemblances, and abundantly show that Judas has not borrowed from Peter, and that Peter has a line as peculiarly his own as that of Judas, and not more so.

We have seen in the Epistles of Peter that the leading truth, besides the bringing out of the grace of Christ, is the righteous government of God under which the saints are placed. We have seen that this righteous dealing does not merely affect the saints, but will most seriously bring the world under its weight before God has closed the matter. Thus in the second Epistle of Peter, naturally, where we see the future judgment carried on even to the end of the thousand years, with the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth

righteousness, the point from which the Holy Ghost views matters is men judged according to the principles of God's righteous government. In the case of Christians all of course flows from and through grace ; but those that have despised the grace of God will not be able longer to despise His government.

The second Epistle accordingly takes this up, and shows that as among the Jews there were false prophets, so now there are false teachers. Of these the Spirit of God gives some very solemn traits. It is said that they have brought in damnable heresies, even denying the sovereign Master that bought them. A word on this may relieve the minds of persons, to whom it often seems harsh that the Lord had bought false teachers and heretics. You must distinguish between being bought and being redeemed.

It is never taught in Scripture that the Lord redeemed a heretic, or any other man that was not saved. There is not a syllable in God's word that enfeebles the certainty of eternal life for the believer ; but it is none the less clearly taught there that the Lord has "bought" every man whatever, saved or not, and believer or not. The result for man has nothing to do with the Lord's purchase. He has bought the world and everything that belongs to it. This is the doctrine everywhere, whether in parable or in doctrine, whether in gospel or epistle ; and this is the constant statement of the Spirit. Of course, therefore, these bad people were bought as well as the rest.

But *redemption* is another thought, and so far from purchase being the same as redemption, the two things are decidedly in contrast. The object of redemption is

to deliver a person from the power of the adversary, to bring one who is a captive out of slavery, to set him free by the ransom paid. This is only true of the believer; he alone is brought out of captivity and made free. It is an efficacious not a nominal deliverance, and belongs only to faith. It is not merely that there is purchase-money; this is not enough for redemption, which is a question of setting a slave or prisoner free, and this is never the case unless a soul believes in Christ. But it is a different thing with purchase: you may buy that which is inanimate, and that which is bought belongs to you indeed, but possibly for harm and shame. Supposing you could purchase a person, what is the effect of the transaction? You make him a slave: thus it is the very reverse of redemption. Redemption makes the slave free, but purchase makes what you buy your property or your slave.

These two facts are both true of Christians, and meet in Christ's blood. The Christian is both redeemed and purchased; but he alone is redeemed. But besides being redeemed, he is bought by the blood of Christ, and therefore it is that he becomes Christ's slave. He is a bondman of Christ Jesus. Perfectly freed by redemption, he is made thoroughly a slave by purchase; and this is precisely the anomaly the natural man never understands. As for the theologians, some of them are not natural men; but one might ask in despair, what it is they ever seem to understand? The fact is that they have so confused the two things as to make the subject hopeless in their hands.

It is clear that the dispute between those called Calvinists and the so-called Arminians turns much on this point, which is then very important. Both of

them agree in the error that redemption and purchase mean the same thing. The consequence is that they never can settle the question. The Calvinist is quite right in his premiss that redemption belongs solely to the household of faith; the Arminian is no less right in his premiss that purchase belongs to every creature under the effects of sin. But they are both equally mistaken in assuming them to be the same thing; and there they wrangle, as they might for ever, without advancing an inch toward settling the matter, because each holds a truth that the other denies. The truth in this question, as in many others which have distracted Christendom, is that faith receives that which the contending parties lose in the dispute; faith bows to the whole truth, instead of being shut up to a part of it. Here then in 2 Peter ii. it will be seen that it is only a question of purchase, which does not imply that these men were ever born of God.

In the next place we are given to see the effects of their teaching and conduct:—"And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Next their covetousness is brought before us, and, more than this, the certainty that sure judgment awaits them—that their destruction does not slumber, but is near and sure. Then Peter says (mark the expression), "For if God spared not angels that sinned"—it is simply a question of sinning in this epistle, of righteousness and unrighteousness—"but cast them down to hell, and delivered them to chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah, one of eight, a preacher of



righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly," &c. These are the topics with Peter, even sin and unrighteousness. Hence he speaks of God who, "turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot" (it is righteousness again), "distressed with the filthy conversation of the godless: (for the righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds)." Nor is this more than the beginning, not the end. They were accordingly reserved for a still greater punishment by and by. This is what is traced more particularly throughout the Epistle on the vastest scale, and finally in the next chapter.

But in Judas we may see a wholly different character of evil. "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to the called that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: mercy to you, and peace, and love, be multiplied." Though professedly the epistle of Judas is to the saints at large, the Holy Ghost brings in the same wish of mercy as is more usually addressed to an individual soul. In fact this Epistle does individualize the saints, and it is of the utmost importance to look at truth for the individual in this place, and to lay hold of it for our own souls. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write to you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." This is not so much the case with Peter; he does not speak of any such contention.

“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old marked out for this sentence, ungodly men.” Mark, it is not merely sin, or unrighteousness : here are seen “ungodly men, turning the grace of our God ;” for it is not men’s righteousness here, nor His righteous government. The evil is “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying” the only Sovereign Master, “and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thus the measure of likeness makes the real difference between the Epistles far more striking than if this Epistle had been written without any points of contact with the other. Of one thing we may be sure, that whether or not Peter referred to Judas, or Judas to Peter, the Holy Ghost had both in view, and distributed to each as He would ; and there are no finer samples of the action of the Holy Ghost in the touching of similar lines of truth, and at the same time of converging with the most consummate wisdom, and the most admirable delicacy of expression as well as of truth, than these two Epistles, that treat of the existent and coming evil under different points of view. Supposing two persons take totally different lines, it is evident that nothing is easier than for each to pursue his own line ; but supposing they come continually close together, it is plain that there is far more difficulty to preserve intact the truth that is given to each. The latter is the case with Peter and Judas : but the Holy Ghost has done the work to perfection.

“I will therefore put you in remembrance, though once for all knowing all things, how that the Lord, having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, in the second place destroyed them that believed not.”

There is not a word about this in Peter. Why here? Because what the apostle Judas is showing is not merely unrighteousness in conduct, but the abandonment of a position of grace, and the virtual turning it into lasciviousness. In fact the grand subject of Peter in his second Epistle is unrighteousness; the distinctive subject of Judas is not this but apostacy (that is, a departure from the place that the grace of God gives at any given time to His own people). Accordingly the warning is founded on a saved people in the next place destroyed, as with Israel brought out of Egypt. It was not persons that behaved badly, but a deadlier evil; they did not believe; they abandoned His truth and ways. "And angels who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath in keeping in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

There again it is the same principle. This makes it all the more striking, inasmuch as Peter speaks of angels too, but not at all from the same point of view. In Peter's case it is simply said that God spared not the angels who sinned, without a word about leaving their first estate or not keeping it. Judas speaks of "angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation." They apostatized also, and in this case the terms are excessively strong, as the guilt is yet worse.

And now comes another example from among men, and this too used by Peter. When I say used by Peter, I do not pretend to attempt to decide the time when the two Epistles were written; nor does it signify that I am aware of. Peter says, "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that

after should live ungodly." Whereas Judas has it: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after other flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the judgment of eternal fire." In this case it is evident that it is a breaking out, not merely into sin, but into that which was beyond measure flagrant, not evil alone, but contrary even to fallen nature. This is what is spoken of here. The very same persons are described in a different manner, according to the object of the Holy Ghost.

So again as to the conduct of the angels. By Peter it is said, "Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord." Judas gives us the more specific charge rather than their general delinquency: "Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee."

Thus it is evident that in every instance Peter takes up the broad ground of righteousness and unrighteousness, while Judas singles out the special character of departure from the truth and perversion of the grace of God (that is, apostacy in short).

But there is another difference too. They both treat of the coming of the Lord: only Peter, true to his character, takes the largest and most expansive aspect possible. He, and he alone, embraces within the day of the Lord the whole of the millennium, and even that which is just before the millennium, and that which is just after it.

He looks at what immediately precedes the millennium, because that day really includes divine judgments in Jerusalem and neighbouring and even distant lands, as various steps of the preliminary judgment of the quick (or men found in more or less open rebellion against the Lord, and despite of His people) before the reign for a thousand years, properly speaking, begins. The millennium follows this epoch,—it may be only a little while after, but still it is after. So again the dissolution of the heavens and the earth does not fall within the millennium but afterwards. There will be a short subsequent space, during which Satan will muster all born during the thousand years who are not born of God. Fire will devour the assembled rebels,—the bursting forth of divine judgment once more on man, until the eternal judgment takes its final course, and the heavens and the earth, then completely consumed, have given place to the new heavens and the new earth in their fullest sense. All these vast events are comprehended within (not the millennium, but) the day of the Lord, either a little before it in the one case, or a little after it in the other.

This illustrates the immense breadth of Peter. So he treats moral questions and dispensational changes, regarding all in this extensive way. But it is otherwise with Judas, whose pen makes every thing precise, just as he, and he alone, gives us in a few brief words the very gall and venom, as it were, of the apostacy. “Woe to them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.”

The only part of this evil that Peter takes up, because



he merely looks at it broadly and as a question of righteous government, is the following of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. But here, although Judas seems to give us more, it is in point of fact all defined with the greatest possible nicety, the brief moral history of the apostacy. "These are spots (more probably, sunken rocks) in your feasts of love, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried along by winds; trees of late autumn, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots: raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames: wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for eternity. And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied as to these, saying, Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all the ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodlily committed, and of all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But ye, beloved, remember the words spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, walking after their own lusts of ungodliness."

Thus it is not the day of the Lord as in the very comprehensive application of Peter; but the fact of His coming and executing judgment on those seized as it were in flagrant sin, caught in the very act. Judas looks at a dealing suited and due to apostates.

But there is another point of precision that, absent

from 2 Peter, is peculiar to Judas. He does not merely resent the mocking taunt, "Where is the promise of his presence?" nor explain the delay by His long suffering and saving of sinners; he does not merely call on the saints to walk becomingly in holy conversation and godliness, waiting for the new and eternal scene wherein dwells righteousness. The characteristic word of Judas savours of special grace. "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." This is distinct Christian privilege, and not merely the necessary godliness which is always binding.

"And of some have compassion, making a difference."\*

\* It is right to notice, if only in a note, that the manuscripts here are singularly in conflict as to the readings. The Sinai and the Vatican, with the corrector of the Rescript of Paris, read ἐλεᾶτε, which is only another form of the common reading ἐλεεῖτε, "compassionate." But there is the awkward repetition of the same word again as a later clause; for the older manuscripts present a threefold division in the sentence. According to the weightiest authorities, it would seem, on the whole, that it should stand thus: καὶ οὓς μὲν ἐλέγχετε διακρινομένους, οὓς δὲ σώζετε ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζοντες, οὓς δὲ ἐλεᾶτε ἐν φόβῳ, μισοῦντες καὶ τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς ἐσπιλωμένον χιτῶνα. "And some convict when contending, but others save, snatching them from the fire, and others compassionate in fear, hating even the garment that is spotted by the flesh." It is curious that Dr. E. Wells, in his "Help for the more easy and clear understanding of the Holy Scriptures" (the part containing these Epistles being published at Oxford, in 1715), adopted this text substantially, which he thus translated: "And some being wavering, rebuke; and others save, pulling them out of the fire; and of others have compassion with fear," &c. He rejected the twofold division, and corrected the form of single words mainly on the authority of the Alexandrian MS., with some others of less weight, confirmed by the Vulgate, the Syriac, and the Ethiopic Versions. With the exception of the error already pointed out, the oldest uncials agree, we may say, in the text here presented,

Some complain if there be a making a difference. I believe, brethren, that, though grace and wisdom be eminently needed for it, yet there can be no sounder principle than this. I repeat, however, that necessarily spiritual discrimination is wanted for each case. God is faithful, who withholds no good thing, and to the humble gives more grace. In the long run divinely-given wisdom becomes more and more apparent in these matters. "But others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

Then he winds all up by bringing before us our own blessed position in a manner altogether different from Peter. "But to him that is able to keep you† from falling." It is not merely that He is able to bring us

save that the Vatican makes, to my mind, a mess by omitting the first οὕς δὲ, which seems to have been an unintentional slip, as the clause is thereby rendered scarce translatable or intelligible. Insert the words with the Sinai and other ancient MSS., and all is plain. Hence this is the form of the sentence preferred by Tischendorf and other modern editors. The nom. διακρινόμενοι of the received text (which the English Version follows) can hardly be traced higher than the ninth century: if it were preferable, the meaning would be as given there. But if the more ancient reading in the accusative stand, verse 9 of this Epistle supplies the probable sense here.

In verse 25 μόνψ (without σόφψ brought in from Rom. xvi. 29) is the right reading, with the very important additions of δ.ά 'I.X. τ. κ. ἡ., and πρὸ π. τ. αἱ. Copyists are apt to enlarge and assimilate; they do not so often, as here, omit.

† Those who idolise a few of the most ancient MSS., to the practical exclusion of other witnesses and internal evidence, would do well to ponder the fact that the Sinai MS. here joins the Parisian Rescript, and the Passionei MS. with very many cursives and most versions in reading ὑμᾶς, "you;" whilst the Alexandrian reads ἡμᾶς, "us," and the Vatican and the Moscow MS. of Matthæi with more than thirty cursives give αὐτοὺς, "them," to which modern editors incline.

into the new heavens and the new earth, which of course is common to all the people of God, to the righteous of all times; but here we have the special inner blessedness of those that wait for Christ, and are caught up to be with Him where He is. "But to him that is able to keep you (?) from falling, and to present faultless before his glory with exultation, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, from before all eternity, and now and to all the ages. Amen."

This is the Lord, not coming to deal with the wicked, but to take us up to be with Himself. It is not the judgment of the unrighteous, nor the righteous government of the nations on the earth, but specifically the coming of our Lord Jesus for His saints. *Now* he understood how Jesus could manifest Himself to His own as He does not to the world, not only in the power of the Holy Ghost while He is away (compare John xiv. 22), but when He comes again to receive us to Himself, to be where He is in the Father's house.

I have thus closed this sketch of the so-called Catholic or general Epistles, which, I may be allowed to say, seems a not very appropriate classification; for James expressly addressed the twelve tribes who are in the dispersion, as Peter the elect sojourners scattered in Asia Minor, his second Epistle being expressly said to be written to the same as the first. Then what is called the first Epistle general of John has more the air of a treatise than of an epistle; nor is it clear that it too did not primarily contemplate believers from among

the Jews, though undoubtedly, like the rest, meant for the direct instruction of the entire assembly of God. His second and third Epistles are as distinctly personal in address as the Epistle of Paul to Philemon. This may have been Calvin's reason for not including them in his exposition of the Catholic Epistles: why he did not write on them at all is less intelligible. It is certainly not because they are not worthy in themselves, or of slight value to the Christian, not to speak of the homage due to the revealed word of our God. Why he did not write on the Revelation is plain enough: neither he nor any of the Reformers had any real understanding of the book as a whole, though they were not wrong in applying Babylon to Rome, and this in good earnest. The Epistle of Judas is in itself at least as general as any of those so classed; but there seems no reason to doubt that he, like his brother James, and like Peter, had the circumcision for the immediate circle of his ministry. John affords most ground for the inference that the Lord employed him to be the vehicle of divine messages among the Gentiles also. (See Rev. i.—iii.)

May the Lord bless His own word, and enable us to prize every tittle of it; and may it have both attraction and authority over our souls, who desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Himself!



## IX.

### THE REVELATION.

Chaps. i.-iii.

THAT God should have chosen John to be the instrument of communicating the closing volume of the New Testament is worthy of our consideration. It is not a new thing for God thus to set out the strongest contrasts by the same inspired writer. He who was emphatically the apostle of the uncircumcision was the appointed witness of Christ to those who had been Jews. The final and above all the decisive message of grace, which called the Jews outside all earthly associations to Christ in heaven, was given neither by Peter nor by James, and by no other than Paul. So too the witness of grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ was, in His mind, if not in man's, the most suited medium for revealing the coming judgments of God. In truth, the moral reason lay in this : that Christ, if rejected as the object of faith, and the only channel of grace, becomes an executor of judgment. This we find formally and doctrinally in his gospel. (chap. v.) And now that grace and truth were about to be utterly set at naught, as He Himself had been before by that which bore His name on the earth, John was more than any other suited to let us see the solemn visions of God avenging

the slighted rights of His own Son ; and this, first, by providential judgments ; lastly, by Christ Himself coming in the personal execution of judgment.

Hence, although there are the most complete contrasts in form, subject, and issues between the gospel and the revelation of John, after all the person of the Lord Jesus is pre-eminently kept before us as the object of God's care and honour in both ; and therefore it is that even the souls that could not enter into the main topics of its prophetic visions have always found unspeakable comfort in the various displays of Christ Himself furnished by this book, especially in times of trial, rejection and persecution. Who that knows ecclesiastical history, who that has present acquaintance with souls, is not aware that the saints of God, with ever so little light, have been exceedingly nourished and helped by the Apocalypse ; while men of learning have made it as dry as an old almanac ?

It is "the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him." Even in the gospel, which is so fragrant with His divine love, we have the frequent—not to say constant—admonition of this remarkable position which Christ takes. In short He is carefully regarded as man on earth, as the sent One who lives on account of the Father—in the gospel as a man on earth, in the revelation as a man most truly wherever He may be seen, whether in heaven or on earth. This book then is the revelation of Jesus Christ, "which God gave unto him." In the gospel it is said, God gives Him to have life in Himself. Nothing can more demonstrate how loyally He accepts, and will not speak inconsistently with, the place of man to which He stooped. For in Him

was life: yea, He was that eternal life which was with the Father before the worlds were. Nevertheless, having become a man in divine grace, He speaks according to that lowly position which He entered here. In glory it is just the same, as we see in the book before us. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants." It is not now to bring them whether or not servants out of that position or even worse, and entitling them to take the place of children of God. This characterises the gospel, because it distinctively is the revelation of grace and truth in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son. Here it is what God was going to do for His glory as the rejected man. He is going therefore to show unto His "bondmen"—a term that would suit not only Christians now, but those who might be in another relationship after we have been taken away from the world. Hence, evidently, there is a comprehensive term employed with divine wisdom, "to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass." It is not to make known what was in Christ before all worlds, but to disclose the great facts in which God was about to maintain the glory of the First-begotten, when He introduced Him into the world. "And he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John."

The angel, it is needless to say, is not without good reason named in relation to the revelations which God was here giving. In the gospel we hear of eternal life in the Son, and this in the grace of God given to the believer. There the Holy Ghost was the only one competent to minister and effectuate such grace according to the counsels of God, and in the ordering of His love.

But here we have visions—visions of God's judicial ways—visions of what would call for judgment in the ever growing iniquity of man. He therefore "sent and signified this by his *angel* unto his servant John." It is another and a remarkable difference. In the gospel John may speak, but he speaks as one who had seen the Lord,—as one who could bear his own personal voucher for whatever he utters. He may speak but seldom of himself, and this he does so effectually that there are not wanting those who have questioned whether after all he were "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Undoubtedly the inference is mistaken; still there is no possibility of charging the writer with putting himself forward in the manner in which he has written. This is a very significant circumstance, more particularly as in the epistles, which contemplate the Christian company or a family or a friend, the one aim and effort is to place the children of God in immediate communion through Christ with Himself: an inspired apostle writes it no doubt, and the various members of God's family, as well as the servants of the Lord, are owned in their place. At the same time it is manifestly He who is God and Father instructing, comforting, and admonishing His own.

We have intervention on every side. God gives a revelation of Jesus; and Jesus passes it on to His angel, or rather by His angel to His servant John; and then John at last sends it to other servants. Thus we have all sorts of links in the chain. And why so? For it is somewhat novel, especially in the New Testament. How comes this remarkable introduction of God to Jesus, then from Him through an angel to one servant, who sends to other servants? How is it that we here miss

that character of direct dealing with us—that immediateness of address which is found elsewhere? The reason is as solemn as it is instructive. It is implied indeed in the analogy of the Old Testament; for God did not always address His people there. He did originally, as for instance in the ten words, though afterwards in this very particular intervention came in. But habitually God's messengers were sent to Israel, even when prophets were raised up. At first all addressed the people in His name. The word of Jehovah was sent to Jehovah's people. But what an affecting change took place at length! The time soon came when the message was not sent to the people directly. It was given to a chosen witness—no doubt really meant for the people, but delivered to Daniel, and only so.

This prepares us for the true meaning of the remarkable change in the Apocalypse as compared with the rest of the New Testament. When the children of Israel had hopelessly betrayed the Lord—when their departure was complete before His eyes—not only in the first rent-off portion, the ten tribes of Israel, but even the remaining two,—when there was a stay and a lengthening of the tranquillity,—when not only Judah, but even the house of David, the anointed king, the last regular link between God and His people, failed, then we find that God addressed not His people, but an only chosen faithful servant as His witness. It was a sure token that all was over for the present, for any immediateness of communion between God and His people. God could no longer recognise them as His own. Applying this to the present time, and our own circumstances, is it not most grave? I do not in



the least doubt that God proves Himself faithful in the worst of times. It would be the falsest possible deduction to suppose that Daniel and his three companions, possibly others also, were not personally as pleasant to the Lord as David was. Did He not look with exceeding satisfaction in His grace upon that servant who felt and answered to His own feelings about His people? It was precisely because He did that Daniel received so exceptional an honour. In a certain sense it was better to be a Daniel in the midst of ruin than to have had the best position when times were prosperous, and when things looked fair. It was a greater proof of fidelity when all was out of course to stand faithful than to be faithful when all things were regular. Thus grace is always equal to every difficulty.

But it is a solemn thing to feel that such a crisis was even then come, as far as regarded the church of God here below. John stands in a position analogous to Daniel; he becomes now the object of the communications of the Lord Jesus, not that which still bore the name of the Lord here below. However the grace of the Lord might act, however He might animate as well as warn, still the address is made directly to His servant John, and not to the church; and even where we have addresses, as we shall find afterwards in the second and third chapters, they are not immediately to the churches, but sent to their *angels*. It is manifest that all carries out the same solemn impression.

John then, as it is said, "testified the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." But this is here restricted: it does not mean the truth in general, nor the gospel in particular, though we cannot doubt that

John did preach the gospel, and did nourish the church of God in all His revealed truth; but this is not the subject of the Apocalypse, nor the meaning of our text. All is here limited to what he saw. This is of importance to apprehend the scope of the passage and the character of the book. We may safely strike out the word "*and*," if we respect the best authorities. The meaning then is that John testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. But how are we to describe or understand "the word of God"? Is it any special part, or the word of God as a whole? What exactly is meant by "the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ" in this connexion? The answer is given by the last clause when "*and*" is taken away:—the visions that he was going to behold and record in this book—whatsoever things he saw. Thus, besides what the apostle had in his ordinary relation with Christians, and his already lengthened tenure in the service of Christ, he receives now a new character of word and testimony.

Accordingly the apocalyptic visions can be slighted only by ignorant unbelief; for they no less than the gospel or epistles are here styled "the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." They are thus carefully ushered in, but in that prophetic method which was morally fitting, in a series of visions which John saw. This is of so much the greater emphasis, as it is apparently designed in an express manner to counteract the tendency (but too common spite of it) to treat the Apocalypse as if it were of doubtful value and of precarious authority. But no: it is confessed to John by Jesus as the word of God and His own testimony. We

know how many scholars have dared to insult the book in their folly, as I think we may say, with the justest rebuke of their offensive language. None the less is it "the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ," even if it consists not of that which ministers directly to the edification of the Christian in his own position, but indirectly as announcing the doom of such as despise God and do their own will in the face of His revelation. Nevertheless it is God's word and Christ's testimony, though as a whole composed of visions.

In order to make this more realised by the believers then or at any other time, be it remarked that we have another word remarkably annexed which lies altogether out of the beaten path of the Lord. May we not presume that it is for the express purpose of graciously encouraging His servants as well as to anticipate the doubts and cavils of unbelief? "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein."

The stated ground that follows is also to be weighed ; for it is not, as men often assume, because we are to be in the predicted circumstances, it is not because the Christian or the church must pass through the troubles it describes : not a word to this effect is implied, but a different reason is given. In short, as the book itself afterwards shows that the church will be on high outside the scene of its varied troubles and inflicted judgments, so the motive assigned in the preface is of a strikingly holy nature, adapted to those who walk by faith, not by sight, and free from all selfish considerations—"for the time is at hand." It is not that the time is actually come so that we must go through all or any

part; but the time is *at hand*. God therefore writes for our comfort, admonition, and general blessing in whatever way it may be wanted; He takes for granted that we are interested in whatever He has to say to us. "The time is at hand." It is a false principle therefore that we can only be profited by that which concerns ourselves, and supposes us to be in the actual circumstances described.

Then comes the salutation. Here too all is as peculiar as it is suitable to the book on which we enter: "John to the seven churches which are in Asia." In no other place do we find anything akin to this. We read of the saints in one place or another. A particular assembly, or even the assemblies of a district (Gal. i.), may be addressed. Never but here occurs an address to a certain number of assemblies, particularly one so definite and significant symbolically as seven. Surely something is meant outside the ordinary course of things, where so unexampled a style of address is found. The spiritual usage of *seven* in prophetic scripture cannot be questioned. Nor is it confined to prophecy, for the same force holds good wherever symbol is employed. In typical scripture, as well as in prophecy, seven is the regular known sign of spiritual completeness. Who then but uninstructed minds can doubt that the Lord meant more than the actual assemblies that were addressed in the province of Asia? That letters were written to literal congregations from Ephesus to Laodicea seems to be unquestionable; but I cannot doubt that these were chosen, and the addresses so shaped to them as to bring before those who have ears to hear the complete circle of the Lord's testimony here below as long as there

should be anything possessed (responsibly if not really) of a church character. The state of things might be ever so ruined; it might be even gross and false (as much was in several); but still there was an ecclesiastical profession if only for His judgment, which we do not find after chap. iv. No such condition appears afterwards. The Lord no longer dealt so when this kind of footing vanished for the responsibility of man. In short, as long as church responsibility exists here below, these addresses apply, and no longer.

So says he "To the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come." It is not "from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The salutation is from God in His own being, the ever-existing One, He who is, and who was, and who is to come. This of course connects His present existence with the future as well as the past. "And from the seven Spirits which are before his throne." Here again we find a description of the Holy Ghost decidedly different from what meets us in the New Testament generally. The allusion is clear to Isaiah xi., where the seven-fold power of the Holy Ghost in government is described as connected with the person and for the kingdom of the Messiah. "And the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest," &c. This seems taken up here, and applied in a far larger way for purposes suitable to the Apocalyptic prophecy. Indeed the same remark will be found true of all the use that is made of Old Testament citations and allusions in the Apocalypse. Constant reference is made to the law, Psalms, and prophets, but it is never a mere repetition, as the literalists suppose, of what was found



there. This would be in effect to deprive ourselves of the Apocalypse, instead of understanding and gathering its peculiar profit. If one identifies the Jerusalem of Isaiah with the New Jerusalem of the Revelation, or the Babylon of Jeremiah to explain the Apocalyptic Babylon, it is clear that one simply loses all the special instruction that God has given us. This is one of the main sources of confusion on the subject of the Apocalypse to this day. At the same time, if we do not start with the Old Testament revelations of Babylon or Jerusalem, or the instruction derived from the prophets generally, we are not prepared for appreciating or even understanding the Apocalypse as a whole. Thus, either to dislocate the New absolutely from the Old, or to see no more than a repetition of the Old in the New, is an almost equal error. There is a divine link in the sense as there was in the Spirit's mind an undistinguished reference; but then the Apocalypse gives it an incomparably larger range, and a more profound character. The Apocalypse looks on things after the Holy Ghost had taken His place in the Christian and in the church on earth—above all, after the Son had appeared, manifested God the Father, and accomplished redemption here below. Hence all the fulness of divine light that had come out in Christ's person and work, as well as by the Spirit in the church of God, is necessary to be taken into account in order to give the Apocalypse its just bearing.

The seven Spirits therefore refer, as I believe, to the Holy Ghost acting in the way of government. It is the fulness of the Holy Ghost's energy as an overruling power. What the application of this may be depends

on the context where it is used. We shall find it in relation to Christ dealing with church matters in chapter iii.; we shall find it in His relation to the earth in chapter v.: but it is always the fulness of the Spirit in governmental power, and not the same Spirit viewed in His unity forming the church into one body. This we have had already in the Pauline epistles, where the proper sphere of the Christian as a member of Christ's body is treated especially, and indeed only there.

God as such is then introduced in Old Testament style and character, but at the same time applied to New Testament subjects; the Holy Ghost also is similarly brought before us. And so too with our Lord Jesus, as we shall see. Indeed, there is nothing more remarkable, especially when we bear in mind who the writer is, than the absence here of His proper relationship to the children of God. The revelation of grace is precisely what is not found in this book. "Jesus Christ" appears as "the faithful witness." This clearly is what He was on the earth. In a very different form it is the topic of John everywhere: we may trace Him as going up to heaven, where Paul above all contemplated Him glorified; but John's task is ever to point to Christ in connection with what He was here below. If he speaks of Him as the Lamb above, the description is founded on His being the rejected sufferer on earth. "He is the faithful witness, the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth;"—the last displayed when He comes from heaven to earth, as He stands in resurrection the first-begotten of the dead. But what He is in heaven is exactly what is not given here. There is the most careful exclusion of His heavenly

position from the relationships of the Lord Jesus that are here brought before us. Even that which connects Him with the Christian, as the One that intercedes for him in the presence of God, is here left out, though I doubt not we may see Him as the angel high priest for others in chapter viii.

The Lord Jesus, then, is brought before us as man purposely in the last place. God was announced in His own everlasting being; the Holy Ghost in His fulness of governmental power; the Lord Jesus in that which was connected with the earth, even if He were risen from the dead; and this put in the last place, because He is viewed only in an earthly point of view.

But for all that the voice of the Christian is at once heard—and so much the more remarkably, because it is one of the few exceptional ripples which cross the ordinary current of the book at the end, as well as at the beginning. Thus it is not without example elsewhere; but it is not what we hear when we have fairly entered on the course of the visions. Before they begin the Christian is heard, as also the bride after they close. Here the name of Jesus is enough to stir the heart in a sweet and suited doxology. He may not be described in His relationships to us, but He who is described is the one that we love. And so “to him that loveth us” (for this is the true rendering, and not merely that loved us)—“To him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages.” And as this is the heart’s outpouring of its own delight in Jesus, so the next verse gives a warning testimony suitable to the

book, lest there should be any weakening of what Jesus will be to those who stand in no such nearness to Him. "Behold he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." This has nothing to do with His presence for us; but after our own delight and thanksgiving have gone forth towards Jesus, the testimony to others most suitably follows the song of praise that had, I may say, involuntarily burst forth at His name. It is Christ coming in judgment. He shall be seen by every soul—if there be any difference—to the sorest anguish above all of those that pierced Him (*i. e.* the Jews). "Even so, Amen."

"I am the Alpha and Omega, saith the Lord God, that is, and that was, and that is to come, the Almighty." He who is the first and the last, comprehending all in communicating His mind, which includes everything that can be given to man—He it is who here speaks—the Lord God, the Eternal. He puts His voucher on the book from the beginning.

Then John describes himself in a manner adapted to the testimony he is called to render: "I John, your brother, and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Christ Jesus, was in the isle which is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus." It must be evident to a spiritual mind how remarkably suited all here is to what was afterwards about to come out. The whole book supposes saints in suffering, and this too in the form of tribulation, with their spiritual experience formed into the associations of Christ's kingdom rather than those of His body the church, yet surely suffering on account

of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Particular care is taken here to show it to us. Not that the full church or Christian relationship was lacking to John personally; but he stands here a representative man for others as well as ourselves. While, therefore, he had all that is properly Christian, he also had very special communications of another character for saints who will follow us at the end of this age. Thus he introduces himself here, not as a joint partaker of God's promise in Christ by the gospel, but in His kingdom and patience in Christ. It is true for us all; but it is in harmony with the latter day sufferers, not what specially linked him with the Christians and the church. Thus the place taken here is of course that of a Christian; but that is put forward which belonged to others who would not be in the same corporate standing as ourselves. At the same time there is the most careful guard against the supposition that he was not in the full enjoyment of his own place in Christ.

This seems to be one reason why it pleased God to give the visions of this book on the Lord's day. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." This is the characteristic day of the Christian; it is the birthday of his distinctive blessing, and it assuredly ought to be the especial joy of his heart, not the less because it is the first day, the resurrection day of grace and new creation, not the seventh day of creation rest and law.

On that day the inspired writer John was in the power of the Holy Ghost with a view to take in and give out the visions he was to see. "And I heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet." It was significant, I think, that the voice was *behind* him. The main object



of all prophecy tended rather to have thrown him forward. But before the Spirit of God could fitly launch him into the visions of the future, there must be a retrospective glance. In the Spirit he must be, both to shut out every impression from external objects, and to give him an entrance into all that God was about to reveal; but first of all we should recognise the fact that it was on the Lord's day; and next that, before he was shown what was before, he must turn to the voice behind him and learn what the Lord judged of that which bore His name on the earth.

Omit the opening clause and begin, "saying, What thou seest, write in a roll, and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia." The reference of the voice behind is exclusively to the seven churches. When another subject is about to open, the first voice which he heard as of a trumpet talking with him said "Come up hither;" there is no question then of a voice behind. He is forward going to look into the future. But there must first be a retrospective notice, in which the Lord would pronounce His judgment of that which bore the name of Christendom here below. "What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice which was speaking with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands." We are told afterwards what those meant.

One like the Son of man is next seen "in the midst of the seven candlesticks,"—which, as we are told, were the seven churches, but these viewed according

to the Lord's mind about them as a standard of divine righteousness. This is the reason why they were golden. Not only is the same principle general or constant, but it is remarkably characteristic of John's own writings. For instance, the standard for the Christian is not in anywise the law (which was so for the Jew); for us it is Christ Himself, and cannot without loss be anything else. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk"—how? Like an Israelite? Not at all: the Christian ought to remember that he is a heavenly man, not an earthly one. He "ought himself also so to walk even as he (Christ) walked." He is not under law but under grace. The reason is manifest, because the way in which we are called to walk is always according to the place and relations in which we stand. Nothing can be simpler. If I am a servant, I ought to behave like a servant. If I am a master, the conduct that might be proper in a servant would not become me. The mixture of relations is always wrong; the oversight of them is loss, their denial ruinous. For every position we are set in, no matter where it is or what, there is always the gracious power of God as our resource; but it is to sustain the person walking in consonance with the relationship in which God has been pleased to put him.

We are not now speaking of anything conventional. Life in Christ, where there is spiritual intelligence, takes one out of the vanities of the world in principle. This remark it may be well to add, because a Christian might say "As I am a gentleman, I must walk like one, and still better now that I have Christ." But nay, this will not do for Christ. Did He thus walk? And are you *not*

to walk as He? Do you not in this merely sink to the world's level? Are you not just taking advantage of an earthly position to escape part of what Christ calls you to? One knows how readily the heart can thus escape from what is really the blessedness of the witness which the Lord has placed in our hands. Is this Christ? We speak then of what Christ has put us in, not about nature and its wishes and feelings. If you have nothing but nature, it would be intelligible; but if you have seen the Son of God and believed in Him, if by grace you have the same life which was in Him, so that this thing is true of Him and of you, no possible standard can suit for you as a Christian short of Christ Himself.

Thus then it is with the seven golden lampstands. All must be and was measured according to God's own mind, and the place in which He set the assemblies. Consistency with Him as a revealed God in Christ is their rule. Therefore they appear as golden lampstands.

But John saw "in the midst of the [seven] lampstands one like the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot." There is not now the sign of activity in service—not the robe tucked up, as often remarked. The Son of man is seen clad in the flowing robe reaching to the feet, and He is "girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."

Here we have to remark that Christ is seen in a

judicial point of view. He is spoken of as Son of man ; and, as we know, this is the quality in which it is given Him to execute every kind of judgment. It is expressly so taught in John's own gospel. (chap. v.) Yet with all this another feature betrays John, and suits him as the writer most strikingly. He that is seen as Son of man is really described with those marks which belong distinctively to the "Ancient of days." Daniel sees the "Ancient of days" in one way, and the Son of man in quite another. John sees the Son of man with the qualities of the Ancient of days. He is man ; but the man seen then and thus is a divine person, the eternal God Himself. Now I ask any fair mind, whose style does this identification of nature suit but the writer that we are now reading? No doubt, morally speaking, He must needs execute judgment ; but John could not lose sight of His divine glory, even where the subject is judgment, and the kingdom everywhere prominent.

Another thing is observable, when one looks into what is said here. A threefold glory of Christ appears: what is personal ; what is relative ; and finally, what is official. But there is more also. John says, "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not ; I am the first and the last." Such terms alone become one who is divine. He who is first is necessarily God ; and He who is first, being God, must certainly be last. Jesus declares Himself to be all this ; yea, more than this—"the living one, and I became dead." The phrase is the strongest possible way of putting the matter. It is not merely that He died—this is not what He says here, though it is said elsewhere, and very truly. But

He says that He *became* dead. This seems to imply His own willingness to die, as indeed He became what did not belong to Him personally, and what in short seemed extraordinarily incongruous with the glorious person that had been already described. This seems conveyed in the peculiarity of the words: so careful is the Holy Ghost to watch over the glory of Christ even in that which told out the depths of His humiliation. "I became dead (records John), and, behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages." We must leave out the word "Amen"—it is spurious, and only mars the sense.

Let it suffice once for all to hope you will understand me always to speak of the text on the basis of the ancient and best authorities. There is positive evidence of the most convincing and satisfactory kind for the insertions, omissions, or changes, which may be mentioned from time to time. Do not imagine that there is anything like arbitrary innovation in this. The real innovators were those who departed by slip or by will from the very words of the Spirit; and the arbitrariness now would be in maintaining what has not sufficient authority, against that which is as certain as can be. The error then is not in seeking the best supported text, but in allowing tradition to tie us to comparatively modern and certainly to corrupted readings. We are bound in everything to yield to the best authorities. So in the next words our Lord really says, "And I have the keys of death and of hades." Not the common text, but this is the true order. No one goes to hades before he dies—death being in relation to the body, hades to the separate spirit.



“Write therefore [which is undoubtedly genuine] the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and what shall be hereafter.” This gives us, as is obvious and familiar to almost every reader, the three-fold division of the book of Revelation. The things that he saw were the glory of Christ in relation to this book, as described in the first chapter, on which we have already touched. “The things which are” present the prolonged condition set forth in the addresses to the seven churches. The expression is very striking, because it not unnaturally implies that the churches were somehow to exist continuously. We can see now why it was. It is very possible, when the epistles were sent out in the days of John, that no particular emphasis would be laid on “the things that are;” but inasmuch as these things have been going on from that day to the present, we can see the immense force such a phrase thereby acquires.

At the same time another way of looking at the book is by taking “the things that are” as already past and gone. I do not doubt that God intended this, and that we are thus given a double aspect of the book. I have no intention to enter at any length on this way of looking at the churches as quite by-gone, and the prophecy as at once flowing on; but I mention it because it seems due to truth to name this as well as the other, according to which “what shall be after these” is when the church condition is no longer applicable at all.

“What shall be *after these*” must be owned as the true translation of the words. “*Hereafter*” gives vagueness: “*after these*” makes it precise, and is the plain literal meaning. “The mystery of the seven stars which thou

sawest on my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are angels of the seven churches: and the seven lampstands are seven churches."

In each letter the Lord addresses "the angel." Who and what is he? We never hear of angel as an official title in the ordinary arrangements of the New Testament. But it is not at all wonderful as occurring here, where we do find what is extraordinary. The angel is a term that suits such a prophetic book as the Revelation. Does it mean what we commonly call an angelic being? Not so, I apprehend, where angels of the churches are spoken of. If we hear of the Apocalyptic angel of fire, we readily understand this; and if we hear of the angel of Jesus Christ as of Jehovah elsewhere, we find no insuperable difficulty. But it is another thing when we hear of the angel of this or that assembly. Again, we can understand an angel employed—a real angelic being—as the means of communication between the Lord and His servant John; but it would be harsh to suppose that His servant John writes a letter from Christ to a literal angelic being. This is the difficulty in which those are involved who suppose that angelic beings are here meant. I do not believe it. The meaning appears to be that, as "angel" is used in the sense of representative, whether an angelic being or not, so in reference to the assemblies the Lord here avails Himself of this general truth. An angel setting forth representation (human or not), an ideal representative of each assembly is meant. In certain cases we know that it might be a literal representative; for instance, when John the Baptist sends some of his disciples, there was a representation of his mind by men. The disciples go

and give the message of him that they followed. But it assumes a somewhat different shape when it becomes a question of assemblies which had not been, so far as we know, sending messengers at all.

If therefore we look at the abstract nature of the angel of the church, what is implied by the term? I take it to be this: that the Lord had in view not necessarily an elder, nor a teacher, but one who might be either or both, and before His mind truly represented, and was in a special way bound up with the responsibility of the state of the assembly. Whoever that might be (one, or perhaps more,) was meant by the angel.

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.” Here we are evidently on broad ground. The characteristics are general. The first epistle, the message to the angel of the church in Ephesus, looks at the state of the Christian testimony on the earth in its most comprehensive form, and, as I suppose, from the days of the apostle John himself. The Lord accordingly presents Himself with similar latitude. “He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand.” It is His position both ministerial and ecclesiastical—His relationship to the angels, or those that morally represented the assemblies to His eye, as well as to the churches themselves. The star is that which acted on the assembly; it professedly was the vessel of light from the Lord for bearing on the condition of the saints of God. If that light was ineffectual, if there was evil

mixed with it, the state of the assembly would partake of it. If it was bright, the assembly would be elevated morally thereby. This, I think, is meant. Then, in Him that held them all in His right hand, and walked in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, we have Christ not merely as holding fast those ideal representatives, but as also taking interest in the assemblies themselves. In short, it is Christ in His fullest but most general ministerial and ecclesiastical aspect, viewed, of course, according to the tenor of the book.

The state of the church in Ephesus has the same generality. "I know thy works, and thy labour, and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil [men]; and thou didst try them which say they are apostles and are not, and didst find them liars." There was faithfulness, and this very particularly in dealing with the wickedness which Satan sought to bring in at that time. The apostles were disappearing, and perhaps had all disappeared save John. I do not of course affirm this; but naturally as the apostles were departing to be with the Lord, Satan would endeavour to furnish instruments nothing loth to claim succession. The church in Ephesus tried these pretended apostles, specially the angel, as one that helped them much by grace from the Lord. The star, as we are told here, so far acted upon the church for good. When thus tried, they tried and found wanting those who set up to be apostles.

But there is much more here. Persistent faithfulness and devotedness still characterised them at Ephesus. "Thou hast patience, and didst bear for my name, and hast not wearied. But I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." This is the Lord's complaint

against them. It is plain that it is here as ever the first departure—the most general symptom of declension. What injures, and finally ruins, is invariably from within, not from without. In vain does Satan seek to cast down those who resting on Christ's love have Him as the loved object of their life and soul. Was it not thus when the epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul? Had they not left their first love? It was not as once. There was failure in this respect. They had here relaxed, but not in their works. These went on diligently, as we learn here. There were works, and labour, and endurance. But where was the work of faith? Where was the labour of love? Where was the endurance of hope? That which had produced the mighty results was no longer active, nor could be. The effect went on; the spring was gone. They had abated in their first love. It was all over with them, unless they judged themselves, and in the power of the Holy Ghost Christ regained His place. "Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I am coming to thee quickly, and will remove thy lampstand out of its place, except thou shalt repent." Whether it be Christ that is represented or the description of the state of the church, whether it be the fault that is charged home, or the remedy that is proposed, whether it be the judgment that is threatened or the promise that is held out,—all is of the most general description. So thoroughly does the Lord adhere to topics of the largest and most common import in the letter to the angel of the assembly in Ephesus. "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him



hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of [my] God." Here again it is all comprehensive. What can be wider than to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God?

In the writing to the angel of the church in Smyrna, a totally different state of things meets us. It is essentially a special case instead of the general one we have seen. The Lord was pleased to afflict after the declension from apostolic purity, and above all from first love. He allowed all sorts of trial to befall His people by letting loose the power of Satan, working by Gentile persecutors. And this is seen to be the occasion of the letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. "And these things saith the First and the Last, who became dead and lived; I know [thy works, and] thy tribulation, and thy poverty, (but thou art rich!) and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but a synagogue of Satan." Here observe it is not now a trial by false apostles. A new evil appears. As long as true apostles were on earth, Satan was never able to have Judaism recognized in the church of God. The council in Jerusalem expressly exempted the Gentiles from being put under the yoke of law. And the apostle Paul showed that it was really to annul Christ—to fall from grace—if the law, introduced either for justification or for a rule of life, were imposed on the Christian. For justification this is manifest; for a rule of life it is not so apparent, but it is just as real a denial of the gospel. If Christ be the rule of life for the Christian, and the law be the rule of death for a Jew, it is evident that for a

Christian to abandon that for this tends to apostacy. The early fathers thus Judaized; and the leaven has gone on working ever since. To take the position of a Jew thus is to be one of those that say they are such and are not, but are alas! Satan's synagogue.

The Lord here contemplates these evil workers (which is what the criers of works come to) forming a distinct party. It is not merely Satan struggling to get in Judaism, but, as He says here, "the blasphemy" (railing, calumny) "from them which say they are Jews, and are not, but a synagogue of Satan." They have now a compact character, and can be spoken of as a synagogue. It was not merely the tendency of individuals. Individuals there were before, but this is much more. It is a formed and known party of the highest possible pretensions. They set up to be more righteous and holy than the rest, whom they denounced as Antinomian because they stood in the true grace of God. They were themselves corrupters and destroyers of true Christianity without knowing it. Deceived by Satan, they were his zealous instruments, so much the more actively deceiving others, because earnest and honest after the flesh.

The patristic party—those commonly called "the Fathers"—seem to be the leaders of the party here referred to. They have the awful ignominy of Judaizing the church of God. They have exercised this influence in all ages, and this is where, as I judge, their formation as a system is stigmatized by the Lord Jesus Christ. Offensive against Himself, they were wholly opposed in principle to grace. Their character is plain. They dragged down the Christian from his own heavenly associations to that of a spurious Jew. What is still

more in John the significant point, they lost all the truth of a real life given to us in Christ. Thus whether it be the depraving of souls or the forming sects after an earthly mould among those who were heavenly according to Paul, or whether it be the taking them away from the life of Christ, and from walking as He walked, and simply putting them under Jewish ordinances, the Fathers, I fear, as a class, fully earned the awful distinction here assigned by the Lord.

When man thus regulated after the Jewish pattern, the whole beauty and aim of the church of God was ruined in principle. But the point of interest here is, that succession and ordinances became defined as a system about this very time. It is the great fact, in contrast with the inspired epistle, that you find even among the ante-Nicene Fathers. Here the Lord seems to me to notice its working at the same time that God was in a measure using for good those that were faithful in the heathen persecutions. Even then Satan was not idle in forming his synagogue "of those that said they were Jews, and are not." On the other hand Christ said in view of the sufferer, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days." The trial was not unlimited: the Lord defined the term of their endurance. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." They might be hurt by the first, they would not be by that which follows and is final. It is a question of faith in God. Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos” comes a very different message. This too is special. “These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest.” It is a serious thing where and how we dwell. “Thou dwellest even where Satan’s throne is.” How came this? One can understand their passing through the scene of his power, but to be dwelling there is significant. Did they like to be near a throne, although it were the throne of Satan—to dwell there? Did they love the shadow or the glitter of human power?

Yet the Lord owns whatever is good. “Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith.” It is remarkable that after the greatest persecutions, when Christendom and even Christians had been seduced into accepting the patronage of the world, up to that point there remained real faithfulness in refusing all efforts to deny the deity of Christ. Under the same Constantine, who was the instrument of thus casting the world’s shield over Christianity, was the battle fought and won against the Arian foe. It was under his authority, and indeed by his call, that the famous council sat at Nicea, and the faith of the Trinity was publicly established. I do not mean of course for Christians, who needed no such bulwark as this, but for Christendom. Thus the creed commonly called Nicene, which had for its object the assertion of Christ’s consubstantial deity, was published at this same time. I cannot but think that this state of things is referred to here: “Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.” What a solemn

conjunction, that there should be this close proximity between Satan's throne without, but withal the mercy of God still maintaining that fundamental faith of Christ's own personal glory!

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." Clericalism came in rapidly after this. The world's authority brought in worldly objects, and now the ministry became a clergy, a more or less profitable profession. The framers of this were those that held the doctrine of Balaam. Simultaneously with this of course there was the introduction of all kinds of compromise with the world. The clergy encouraged by a misuse of scripture every sort of commerce with the world's evil ways; as it is said here, "who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication." I do not doubt that all this is symbolically expressed. But the drift is plain enough where the conscience is not blunted. Where the same evils exist, and all that which would keep the church as a chaste virgin espoused to Christ is gone, no wonder that these warnings are misunderstood. The world had got in, as it still remains, and alas! palliated most by those who owe their professional status to this frightfully corrupt and corrupting influence. And the same spirit of unbelief which let in the mischief keeps it in, decrying the true application of the two-edged sword now as then. The Christians were dazzled by the world's power and glory, which was put forth doubtless in protecting, not themselves only, but the public faith of Christendom in that day. At the same time they fatally compromised Christ by



alliance with the world, and there followed the practical return to the world out of which grace had taken the church in order to union with Christ in glory.

“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.” The first of these epistles to the angel of the church in Ephesus denounced “the deeds of the Nicolaitans;” but now the iniquity in question (Antinomianism it would seem) had become a doctrine. “Repent; or else I am coming to thee quickly, and will war against them with the sword of my mouth.” Thus the Lord was no longer fighting in defence of His own people, nor was He employing the enemy’s hatred and persecution to nip in the bud or prune evil excrescences. We have seen this just before. A greater trial appears now. Yet, alas! the state of those that bore His own name was such that He was obliged to deal thus sternly with them.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.” When the church was seeking the place of public glory, the encouragement to faith was the hidden manna. Let there be at least individual even if unvalued faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. There were, I doubt not, some saints true to His name, though it was not the time when they were led or forced into the position of a remnant. It was not yet a question of coming out from the public body. There might not be energy of faith for this, but at any rate fidelity to Christ was not lacking, and where this was—“To him that overcometh,” says the Lord, “I will give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written,

which none knoweth save he that receiveth it." To the true heart His approval is enough, and sweeter than triumph before the universe.

Then follows the last of these four churches. "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write." I cannot doubt that this letter contains an apt adumbration, as far as could be there in present facts, of what was found in mediæval times. "These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass." Christ is revealed now, not only in the all-discerning power of moral judgment, but also judicially prepared to act against evil—"His feet like fine brass." "I know thy works, and thy love, and faith, and service, and patience, and thy last works (to be) more than the first." There was considerable devotedness in the middle ages, spite of the darkness and ignorance that prevailed in point of doctrine. But those who loved the Lord showed their love then not so much by intelligence in His ways, as by unsparing and habitual self-denial. I am not now speaking of what was done out of superstition, either to Mary or the church, when each was made a sort of *bona Dea*, but of the fruit of looking to Christ however simply.

"Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman (perhaps 'thy wife') Jezebel." This was a new kind of evil altogether. It is not simply clericalism now, nor persons holding the doctrine of Balaam; but a formal state of things, as the symbol of a woman regularly represents. Examine the use of woman symbolically, and you will find, I believe, that this is true. The man is the agent that

goes forward ; the woman is the state of things that is produced. Jezebel therefore is the appropriate symbol now, as Balaam was just before. The activity was in the clergy, who brought in the basest compromise with the world, and sold the honour of Christ for silver and gold, for ease and dignity. Here we find Jezebel later. This was the public state of things produced in the middle ages, and tolerated where the Lord was named.

As it is said here, "Because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess." It is precisely the claim of the so-called church,—the assumption of permanent infallibility—the setting up to be a sort of inspired authority to enunciate doctrine, and to direct everything in the name of God. Is not this exactly what Romanism does? Does it not then stand in the place of Jezebel?—"Who calleth herself a prophetess, and teachest and seducest my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." All was the fruit, doubtless, of what had been works before, but in far greater maturity now. "And I gave her space that she should repent; and she will not repent of her fornication. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death." Jezebel was a mother indeed—a holy mother, said the deceivers and deceived. What said the Lord? what said those who preferred "great tribulation," rather than commit adultery with her? This flagrant church-world corruption was now a settled institution. It is no mere transient cloud of error; it is a body in the highest worldly position—a queen, but also pretending to the highest spiritual power

—a prophetess so-called, that was now permanently settled in Christendom, giving birth to a distinct progeny of iniquity—"her children." But says He who has eyes like a flame of fire, "I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts : and I will give to each according to your works."

"But to you I say, the rest (or remnant) in Thyatira." The remnant is here plain. Thus we must read the text and translate it. We must leave out "and unto." The common text which gives rise to the current versions spoils the sense completely. It is to the rest, or the remnant in Thyatira, "as many as have not this doctrine," that the Lord turns.

Let us weigh a little more these remarkable words. Here we have for the first time the formal recognition of saints not included in the public state of the assembly, yet not so openly separate as was found at a later day. Still they become a witnessing body more or less in spirit, apart from that which set up the highest pretension but in profoundly wicked communion with Jezebel, as the Lord judged and stigmatized what man called "our mother, the holy Catholic church." "To you I say, the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not known this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come." Thus the Lord speaks with exceeding tenderness of those that were true to His name. He did not expect great things from them. I do not the least doubt that those who are commonly called the Waldenses and Albigenses, and others per-

haps of similar character, are referred to here. They were true and ardent, but with no considerable light of knowledge if measured by a fuller and richer testimony which the Lord was afterwards to raise up, as foreshown in the next chapter.

The Lord at the close gives a promise suited to the condition. "He that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." This wicked Jezebel not only persecuted the true saints of the Lord, but sought universal supremacy—a world-wide dominion over souls. The Lord bids them in effect to have nothing to do with her, and He will give the true power when He takes it Himself. Let them abide in the place of patience, even though there be tribulation, as there must be if they are content to endure for Christ's sake now. "But he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as a vessel of the potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father." The faithful will share Christ's power at His coming, and be associated with Himself in His kingdom. But even this is not enough for grace. "And I will give him the morning star." This is not association with Christ in His public reign, but in that which is proper to Him above the world altogether. The heavenly hope of being with Christ is promised as well as part in the kingdom.

And here, it has been well observed, a notable change takes place. The call to hear begins to follow the promise, instead of being before it. The reason is that



a remnant is now formed. This does not go along with the public state of the church now. The Lord thenceforth puts the promise first, and this apparently because there is no use longer to expect the church as a whole to receive it. The address is to the overcomer, who is accordingly put before the call to hear. In the three previous churches it may be noticed, the call to hear is first, because the Lord is still dealing with the general conscience of the church. This is given up now. There is a remnant only that overcome, and the promise is for them. The Lord simply takes notice of these in His call. As for others it is all over with them.

Accordingly the division of the next chapter (iii.) seems to be happy at this point. There is an immense change in turning to the last three churches. The ground of such a thought lies in the fact that the introduction to Sardis indicates the Lord beginning again a new state of things. The ancient ecclesiastical or catholic phase of the church terminates with Thyatira: nevertheless Thyatira in this has the peculiar trait that it is the close of the public state of the church, and the beginning of those conditions which go on till the Lord's coming. Thyatira, I have no doubt, contains within it the mystic representative of Romanism. This can hardly be denied to Jezebel at least; whilst "the remnant" represents those who, without being Protestants, form a witnessing company apart from popery, yet before the rise of Protestantism. The beginning of the third chapter introduces the protestant state of things.

Thus we have had the general condition falling into

decline; we have had the early persecution from the heathen; we have had the power of the world patronizing the church; and we have had finally Romanism, which alone (from the allusion to Christ's coming) is supposed to go on to the end.

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.” There is an evident allusion to the manner in which the Lord presented Himself to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was the first presentation of the general public state. Sardis gives the rise of the new state of things, not strictly ecclesiastical—the Lord acting in the way of testimony, and not so much in ecclesiastical order. Hence it is not said here that He walks in the midst of the seven lampstands: that was ecclesiastical strictly. But here He has the seven Spirits of God. He is God. All power, all governing might, is in His hands, and the seven stars, that is to say, all the instrumental means by which He acts upon the church. “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” Such is Protestantism.

“Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.” Hence what judges Protestantism is this, that they have the testimony of God's word much more fully than those who had sunk into the mere ecclesiastical formalism of the middle ages. There the word of God had been kept away, because the clergy and the word of God can never go together thoroughly. It is, and always must be, the effect of the clerical principle to substitute the authority of man,

more or less, for that of the Lord, and to weaken and hinder the immediate action of the Spirit by the word of God on the conscience. I am speaking not of individual clergymen at all, but of clericalism wherever found, Catholic or denominational, nationalist or dissenting.

But the Protestant principle is a very different one. People may not be true to their principles, and often are not. Still, after all, one of the grand points fought for at the Reformation, and gained for Protestantism, whatever might be its defects, was this ;—that man was put fairly, freely, and openly in presence of the Bible. God's word was there to deal with human conscience. I do not speak of justification by faith ; for even Luther, as I think, never got thoroughly clear as to the truth of it. And though Catholics are miserably deluded, Protestants do not understand justification to this day. They have the truth in a measure, but not so as to clear souls from bondage, or bring them distinctly into liberty, peace, and the power of the Spirit. Even Luther never had peace in his soul, as the settled state in which he walked. We have most of us heard what conflicts he had, and not merely at the beginning of his career but to the end. I do not mean conflicts about the church, but about his soul. It is needless here to cite passages from his extant writings, which prove how sorely he was tried by inward conflicts of unbelief, which amply prove how far he was from the calm enjoyment of the peace of the gospel ; but it is an error to impute them in themselves to any other cause than a lack of clear knowledge of grace. In such a state, all sorts of things may trouble the man who

cannot rest without a question on the Lord, no matter how able and honoured he may be. I am sure Luther is one from whom we may all learn much; whose courage, faithfulness, self-renunciation, and endurance are edifying and instructive. At the same time it is useless to blink the fact: energetic as he was and used of God largely, he was far behind in the understanding both of the church and of the gospel.

Yet, spite of drawbacks, an open Bible was won for God's children in particular, and for man also. This very thing condemned the state of Protestantism that resulted; because, while it was freely read, there was scarce any thought of forming all upon the Bible, and regulating all by it. Nothing is more common among Protestants, than to admit a thing to be perfectly true because it is in the word of God, without the smallest intention or thought of acting upon it. Is not this a very serious fact? The Romanists are in general too ignorant to know what is or is not in the Bible. Except the common-places of controversy with Protestants, they know little of Scripture. Tell them that this or that is to be found in the Bible, and they look amazed. They may not know it as a whole, having never read it save (?) under the eye of the directing priest, their confessor. The Protestant reads the Bible more at liberty, which is a real good and precious boon; but for this very reason, the Protestant incurs no light responsibility.

"I have not found thy works perfect before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief." It is a sweeping intimation of the very same way in which the Lord

threatens to come on the world. Now if there be in the state of Protestantism one thing more marked than another, it is that they always fall back on the world to deliver themselves from the power of the priest or the church. This has ever been the chief snare, as it is now. If even what belongs to the world be touched, they are in no small agitation about it. I am far from saying this because I do not feel for them much. Nor is it that I have any doubt that it is a great sin to wipe off all public recognition of God in the world. Impossible to believe that *e.g.* the unblushing worldliness one sees in the combination of Dissenters with Papists and infidels springs from just, pure, holy, and unselfish motives. It is rather to be imputed to the encroaching spirit of infidelity, where there is not also a truckling to superstition. Doubtless the infidels hope to gain the day, as the superstitious are very confident on their part; but the truth of it is that the devil will get the upper hand to the destruction of them both, and then find that the Lord will appear in His day for His own judgment of all the adversaries.

The Lord then warns the angel at Sardis, that if he should not watch, He Himself will come on him as a thief, and he shall not know what hour Christ will come on him. This is not at all the way in which His coming is spoken of for His own. They are waiting for Him—expectantly without such an idea as His thief-like surprise. How can it surprise those who are ever awaiting Him? His coming is their joy, and for this they watch more than watchman for the dawn. The figure of the thief can be employed only for the world or the worldly-minded. So solemnly then does this language suppose



that the assembly at Sardis have passed out of the practical attitude of waiting for the Lord as a loved object. All intimates that they are in great, and no doubt just, dread of Him as a judge. They have slipped into the world, and share its fears and anxieties. They have lost the sense of Christ's peace left with them. They have not the joy of His coming for them in perfect love, to receive to Himself those whom He loves. The unwelcome visitation of a thief would be utterly incongruous if they were enjoying the sweet hope according to His own word, that He is coming for them quickly.

He that overcomes should be clothed in white, for there were a few in Sardis who had not defiled their garments, and who should thus walk with Him in white ; because they are worthy. This has been always the case. Precious souls are there, and our happy service is to help these then, if we can, to a better knowledge of His grace,—not, of course, to make light of their being where they are, or of their doing what they do, yet in the fullest love to feel about them as the Lord does. “He that overcometh,—he shall be clothed in white raiment ; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, and will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

In the next place comes Philadelphia. “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write ; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shall shut ; and shutteth, and no man shall open.” Every word of Christ's presentation of Himself differs from the view of Him given in chapter i. This marks particularly the

change in the chapter, and especially in the part before us. The address to Sardis also, although allusive to that of Ephesus, is nevertheless no less clearly meant to stand contrasted with it. It is a recommencement, and so far is analogous with that to Ephesus: still, the manner in which the Lord is presented is quite new. His having the seven Spirits of God was distinct from the Ephesian picture; nor is anything at all similar in the description of the Lord Jesus given before. It is a new state of things; but when we come to Philadelphia there is far more evidence of all things new. "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true." When the Lord is seen in the vision of chapter i., these are not the ways in which He is described at all—"He that hath the key of David."

In the descriptions of the second chapter what was said about the Lord is a repetition of what was found in the vision John had just seen. The only exception is in Thyatira, where He is described as the Son of God; and, as already remarked, Thyatira is exactly transitional. It is the beginning of the changed condition. It is a church state in responsibility though not in real power, being an ecclesiastical body which presents horrors in the Lord's eyes, but not without a remnant dear to Him. This at the same time goes on down to the end, and brings in the Lord's coming; for, it will be observed, the coming of the Lord is not introduced in any of the first three, but from Thyatira it is, because the condition intended goes on to the coming of the Lord. Ephesus does not, nor Smyrna, nor Pergamos: the only semblance of it is in threats of present judgment. Thyatira does, and so Sardis, and also Philadelphia.

But Philadelphia also prominently brings out the Lord in person as also in His moral glory. It is now Christ Himself, and this as One that faith discovers in new beauty, not dependent merely on visions of glory which had been seen before, but Christ as He really is in Himself—"He that is holy, he that is true." But more than this, it is Christ seen according to the largeness of His glory. Faith sees that the blessed One, the holy and the true, is the same that has the key of David. Old Testament prophecy—dispensational truth—is introduced now. It is "he that openeth, and no man shall shut." There is perfect liberty now—liberty for service, liberty for every one that belongs to the Lord. "I have set before thee an open door, and none can shut it: for thou hast a little strength." They are supposed to be not marked by such mighty doings, as Sardis was. Sardis did great exploits, Philadelphia nothing of the sort. Are we content to be little, my friends? to be of no esteem in the world? never to be marked by anything that men can wonder at or admire? I am supposing now a scale which attracts the world's attention.

This is exactly what is not true of Philadelphia, which is rather formed after a rejected Christ. We all know of what small account He was on earth; and so it is with Philadelphia. Has it no price in His eyes? "Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." Just as Jesus was marked by valuing the word of God, and loving it—being the only One that could truly say to Satan as true of Himself, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," so here Philadelphia is distinguished by the same living by faith. To some it might

appear a small thing not to deny Christ's name, but nothing is more precious to the Lord. Once it was a question of not denying His faith, as was found in Pergamos; but here it is Himself personally. What He *is* is the main point. Mere orthodoxy does not suffice, but His person, though absent, and the glory due to Him.

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not.” Is not this the revival of that dreadful scourge that had afflicted the early church (even Smyrna)? Have we not heard of it? And have we not seen it ourselves? How comes it, that for so many hundreds of years only a part of what the Fathers had laboured at sunk into the minds of men, a certain portion being rejected, as we know, by Protestantism; but now, when God brings out this fresh testimony, there rises a counter-testimony? Satan revives the old Judaizing spirit, at the very time that God re-asserts the true principle of Christian brotherhood, and, above all, makes Christ Himself to be all to His people. And here we have for our instruction the fact, that the synagogue of Satan—of those who say they are Jews, and are not—revives. How stand the facts? How are they even in this country? What is commonly called Puseyism tends to this; and that system is not confined to this country. You must not think it is merely a question of England; it holds equally abroad, as in Germany and elsewhere—in fact, wherever Protestantism is found, and, above all, wherever this is provoked, either by scepticism on the one hand, or on the other by truth that condemns both with the brightness of heavenly light. In order to defend

themselves on a religious footing, men fall back on a system of ordinances and of the law. This is, I think, what is meant by the synagogue of Satan here.

But the Lord will compel the recognition of His own testimony. I do not say when, where, or how; but as surely as He lives, will the Lord vindicate the truth He has given, and the testimony He has raised up for His name. "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

Nor is this all. Not only will the Lord thus vindicate what is of Himself, but, as we know, there is an awful time coming on this world—an hour, as it is said here, not simply of tribulation, but of temptation or trial. I am inclined to think that the hour of trial embraces the whole Apocalyptic period; that is, not merely the awful time when Satan in a rage is expelled from on high, and when the beast, energised by him, rises to his full head of power, but the previous period of trouble, seduction, and judgment. In short, "the hour of temptation" is, I conceive, a larger term altogether than the "great tribulation" of Rev. vii., and still more than the unparalleled tribulation which is to befall the land of Israel. (Dan. xii. Matt. xxiv. Mark xiii.) If so, how rich and full is the promise: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." In vain men try to escape! The hour of temptation must come upon all. I dare say that some of us remember when people used to fly to Canada in order to escape "the great tribulation" which they expected to fall on the empire of the beast. Men's scheme was



a mistake, their flight foolish. The hour of temptation will catch them, no matter where they may hide. The hour of temptation shall come upon all the habitable world, "to try them that dwell upon the earth," be they where they may.

Who then can escape? Those who at Christ's call are caught up to heaven. They will not be in that hour. It is not only, be it observed, that they will not be in the place, but they will be kept out of the hour, of that coming temptation. What a full exemption! Such is the strength of the promise and the blessedness of it, that the Lord promises His own to be kept from the time. The only possible way I can understand of exempting any from the time is by taking them out of the scene. The Irvingites used to talk about the Lord having a little Zoar. It is not at all however a question of a place of shelter, but of complete removal from the period that is filled by the great trouble or trial that will come upon the habitable world. How can this be secured but by removing them out of the scene before the time arrives? Such I believe the promise here to import. The godly remnant of Jews, having to do with a special and most fierce but circumscribed tribulation, have only to flee to the mountains in order to escape till Jesus appears in glory, to the confusion of their foes. It is quite another thing for Christians.

"Behold, I come quickly!" There is not a word about His coming as a thief now, but with joy. The Lord has revived the true hope of His return; there are those who are thus waiting for Christ, and this epistle seems emphatically to apply to such. "Behold, I come quickly!" In principle it is true of all that are really

faithful, but there may be Christians, as we know there are, involved in one or other of the various states which have been described, and which apparently go on to the close. It is in vain therefore to look for a formal obliteration of these co-ordinate conditions, which cannot be till the Lord comes. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name." He will be as much marked by power in the day of glory, as by contented weakness in the present scene of grace.

We have yet the last epistle to the angel of the church in Laodicea. But of this I would say but a few words, considering the late hour. The Laodicean picture is, in my judgment, the result of dislike and contempt for the testimony that the Lord had previously raised up. If people despise the truth possessed by those who are waiting for the Lord, they are in danger of falling into the awful condition that is here set forth. Christ is no longer the loved and only object of the heart; nor is there the sense of the blessedness of His coming, which leads into waiting for Him; still less is there a glorying in weakness that the power of Christ may rest on them. There is the desire to be great, to be esteemed of men, "rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing." You find here a scope, therefore, that leaves ample room for man. Hence it is that the Lord intro-

duces Himself to them as the Amen,—the end of every thing human,—where all the security is in the faithfulness of God. He only is “the faithful and true witness.” That is exactly what the church ought to have been and was not; and therefore He has to take that place Himself. It was so before when He was here below in grace, and now He must resume its power and glory and judgment, than which one can hardly conceive a greater and more solemn rebuke on the condition of those who ought to have been His witnesses. Besides He is “the beginning of the creation of God.” It is a setting aside of man altogether; and the reason is that Laodicea is the glorification of man and of man’s resources in the church. “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” They are neutral in principle and practice, being half-hearted about Christ. And I am persuaded there is no place which is more likely to generate neutrality than a sound and true position, if there be not self-judgment maintained and godly sincerity. The more you stand in the forefront of the battle, with the responsible testimony of God, the more you have the grace and truth of God brought out before and by you, if the heart and conscience be not governed and animated by the power of the Spirit of God, through that truth and grace that is in Christ, sooner or later, there will be, beyond a question, a lapse back into a position of neutrality, if not of active enmity. There will be indifference to all that is good; and the only kind of zeal, if there be zeal, will be for what is bad.

This is exactly Laodiceanism. “So then because thou

art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked : I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." They wanted everything that was precious :—"gold" or divine righteousness in Christ ; "white raiment," that is to say, the righteousnesses of saints ; "that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." They had lost the very perception of what was for God. All was dark as to truth, and uncertain as to moral judgment. Holy separateness and savour were gone. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten : be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The Lord presents Himself even there in the most gracious way to meet their need. But the utmost promised in the word that closes the epistle goes not beyond reigning with Him. It is nothing special. For every one that is in the first resurrection is destined to reign with Christ, as even will the Jewish sufferers, earlier or later, under the antichrist. It is all a mistake, therefore, to suppose that this is a singular distinction. It amounts to this—that the Lord will hold, after all, to His own truth, spite of unfaithfulness. There may be individual reality even where the associations are miserably untoward.

## X.

### THE REVELATION.

Chaps. iv.-xi. 18.

WE have already seen the bearing of the seven churches to which the Lord was pleased to send the letters contained in the second and third chapters. We have found, I trust, substantial reason and ample evidence in their own contents, as well as in the character of the book itself, to look for a meaning far more comprehensive than a literal historical notice of the condition of the Asiatic churches which were then primarily addressed. It is, of course, ground well known to all that John wrote to seven churches; but that no more was meant than the existing assemblies is more than ought to be assumed. The septenary number is significant, and the division of the seven into two parts. Again, the order of their contents, as well as their nature severally, points to the same conclusion. Further, it is plain that certain phases do not necessarily abide, while at a given point in their course the language implies the state of things meant by them to continue up to Christ's return. That point is Thyatira, and thenceforward the same feature is in Sardis, Philadelphia, and of course Laodicea. Beginning successively, these go on together. But it is equally remarkable that the first three churches



do not. What I gather from it is, that the three earlier churches are severed in character from the rest; for though all are alike typical, only the last four are used as fore-shadows of successive states of things about to ensue, and then be concurrent up to the Second Advent. We can easily understand two things: first, the succession of seven different states represented by those seven churches; and, secondly, that of the seven, three passed away, only retaining a moral bearing; whereas the last four have not this only, but a prophetic and successional bearing, and from the epoch of their appearance, run along-side of each other till the coming of the Lord Jesus.

But the remarkable fact which meets us from chapter iv. and onward is, that we no longer find any church condition on the earth. This confirms the same fact. Had these churches not been meant to have an application beyond the literal one, how could it be accounted for? If, on the other hand, besides that historical application, they were meant to be prophetic, we can easily comprehend that the Lord did address assemblies then existing, but meant by them to give views of successional states that should be found up to the close, when four of these states go on together. Thyatira brings before us the public character of corrupted Christendom—that which is notoriously found in Popery. Then, again, Sardis is that which is well known as Protestantism: there might be orthodoxy, but withal a manifest want of real life and power. This is followed by the revival of the truth of Christian brotherhood, with an open door for the work as well as word of the Lord, and His coming acting powerfully,

not merely on the mind as a conviction, but on the affections as attaching to the Lord Jesus. This is found in Philadelphia. Then Laodicea shows us the final state of indifference that would be produced by the rejection of these warnings and encouragements of the Lord.

From the fourth chapter we have the Spirit of God leading the prophet into the understanding of not the church-state, but that which will follow when churches are no longer before the mind of the Lord—when it becomes a question of the world, not without testimonies from God in the midst of gradually swelling troubles; but His witnesses henceforward of Jewish or Gentile character, never more after that of the church on earth. Believers we do see, of course,—some of them of the chosen people, others of the nations; but we hear of no such church condition as was found in the second and third chapters. One of the most striking proofs of the way in which the patent facts of the word of God are habitually passed over is, that this has been so constantly overlooked. There have been hundreds, perhaps thousands, of books written on the Revelation, yet it is only of comparatively recent date that so plain, sure, and grave a feature seems to have been seen. I speak now from some acquaintance with that which has been written on the book from the Fathers down to our own days. As far as I remember, there does not occur in hundreds of the ablest books about it which have passed through my hands, the slightest reference even to this undeniable and important fact which lies on the surface of the prophecy.

I draw from this nothing complimentary to man's

mind, but the contrary. It loudly confirms those who are convinced of the necessity of the teaching of the Holy Ghost, to profit even by what is plain, certain, and obvious. There is no book so remarkable as the Bible in this respect: no learning nor acquirement, no brightness of mind or imagination, will ever, without His power, enable any soul to seize, enjoy, and use aright its communications. They may, no doubt, perceive one fact here and another there; but how to employ even these for good will never be known unless the Spirit of God give us to look straight to Christ. He that has Christ before him is soon sensible of a difference of relationship and its results. Christ has special ways of dealing with the church that are suitable to none else. This closes with the end of the third chapter.

The inference is obvious. New things come before the Lord, as well as the reader. Now, as notoriously the great mass of persons who bear the name of the Lord have assumed, without the smallest proof from scripture, that the church has always been and always will be while the work of converting souls proceeds on earth, it is clear that this assumption erects an impassable barrier against the truth. No wonder people fail to understand the Bible when they enter on its study with a principle which opposes at all points the revealed truth of God. There is no such notion in the Bible. It is found in no part either of the Old or of the New Testament; as little as anywhere else is it tolerated by the book now before us. Thus we see churches existing when the book begins; but they are found no more, when the introductory portion closes and the proper prophecy is entered on. A church

condition is not, strictly speaking, the subject of prophecy, which deals with the world, and shows us divine judgments coming on its evil, when God is about to make room for good according to His own mind. Such is the great theme of the book of Revelation. But inasmuch as there were Christian assemblies then, the Spirit of God is pleased to preface it with a most remarkable panoramic view of the church condition as long as it should subsist before the Lord on the earth. And we have seen this given with the most striking wisdom, so as to suit at the time of John, yet also as long as the church goes on always to apply, and increasingly, not every part at once, but with sufficient light to give children of God full satisfaction as to the mind of the Lord. In fact, it is the same here as in every other part of scripture: none can really profit by the word, whether in Genesis or in the Revelation, without the Spirit, and this can only be to the glory of Christ.

If this be so, we can understand the vast importance of the change that is here observable. The prophet enters by the door into heaven. Of course this was simply a vision. The power of the Holy Ghost gave him thus to enter and behold; it was not a question of sensible facts. He was immediately in the Spirit, it is said; and in heaven he beholds a throne set, and this, from its effects and surroundings, a judicial throne. It is not at all the same character of the throne of God as we know and approach now. We come boldly to the throne and find grace and mercy to help in time of need. But we find nothing of the sort here, either in the throne or in what issues from it. Even a child might read

better the force of the symbols employed for our instruction. What is meant by lightnings and voices and thunderings? Is it too much to say that he who could confound the aspect of the throne in Hebrews iv. with that of Revelation iv. must have a singularly constituted mind? I cannot understand how any attentive reader could fail to see the difference, not to speak of one spiritually taught. Indeed, the amazing thing is, how any person in his sober senses could conclude that the two descriptions characterize the same state of things. They stand really in the strongest possible contrast.

Here we have the throne, not of divine mercy, but invested with what was proper to Sinai: it discerns, denounces, and destroys the evil of the earth. Thus it is the seat and source of judgment on the ungodly. I admit that it is not yet the throne of the Son of man reigning over the world. The time is not come at this point for the church to reign with Christ over the earth. In chapter v. the reigning over the earth is spoken of as a future thing (*"shall reign over the earth"*), and not yet a fact. Clearly, therefore, we see here a transitional state of things after the church condition ends, and before the millennial reign begins. Such is the manifest truth necessary to understand the Revelation. As long as you do not admit this, you will never, in my judgment, understand the Apocalypse as a whole.

Then we are told that the likeness of Him that sat on the throne is compared to a jasper and a sardine stone. This obviously does not refer to the divine essence, which no creature can approach to or look upon. It is God's glory so far as He was pleased to allow it to be made visible to the creature. Consequently it is com-



pared to those precious stones of which we hear in the city afterwards.

But there are other notable features of the throne. We are told that round about it "there was a rainbow in sight like an emerald." God marks here His remembrance of creation. The rainbow is the familiar sign of the covenant with creation, and it was presented prominently to the prophet's mind. The various points noticed are as in God's mind, not merely as in man's eyes. Thus the rainbow is not seen in a shower of rain upon the earth. It is a question of the simple truth that was set forth by it, and nothing more. So it is with all the other objects seen in this vision.

Next, "round about the throne were four and twenty elders." The allusion is evident to the four and twenty courses of priesthood. Only it will be observed that it is not the whole number (the twenty-four classes of men), but simply the chief priests of these courses. The twenty-four elders, in my opinion, refer to the heads of the priesthood. Therefore this is of some importance to bear in mind, because we find subsequently others that are recognized as priests who were not yet in heaven, who indeed were only called out on the earth after this. Unquestionably these others became priests, but no more elders are recognized. No addition is ever made to the company of elders; they are a fixed number. Priests there are afterwards, but no heads of priesthood save these elders.

These heads of priesthood, I have no doubt then, are the glorified saints above; and in that glorified body, as I apprehend, are the Old Testament saints as well as the New. You will see from this, that I am as far as

possible from wishing to undervalue the grace of God to those of old. It seems to me that there are good grounds to infer from the prophecy itself that the twenty-four elders are not merely the church, but all those saints that rise up at the presence of the Lord Jesus (as it is written, they that are Christ's at His coming or His presence). This is unquestionable to my mind. The rising from the dead includes all saints up to that time, and of course, at the same time, the change that is described in the latter part of the same chapter. (1 Cor. xv.) All saints deceased or then alive appear to me meant. Thus the Old Testament saints and those of the New are changed; for the "dead in Christ" ought scarcely to be limited merely to the body of Christ. But the phrase "the dead in Christ" means all that have their relationship in Christ, and not merely in Adam; they did not die in the flesh, but died in Christ. It is not a question of Adam the first, but of the Second; but as the one embraces all the Adam family, it seems to me the other should be equally broad. Thus we must leave room in the twenty-four elders for the glorified, whether in the Old Testament times or in the New. This does not in the smallest degree compromise the special character of the church. It will be shown how remarkably this is preserved and manifested in a later point of the visions. At present I merely wish to state briefly what I believe to be the force of the symbol here.

These twenty-four elders, again, are clothed in white raiment, as also they have crowns of gold. They are seated on thrones. It is impossible to apply this to angelic beings. Angels are never so crowned or enthroned. Nowhere do we hear of an angel called to

any such dignity. Power no doubt they might wield, but never do they reign; they have the execution of the will of God in outward things, but never do they administer it after this royal pattern. This is destined for the glorified saints—for the redeemed, and not for angels; and this because Christ has given them the title of grace by His blood. As it was said in a previous chapter, He has made us a kingdom,—priests to His God and Father. In chapter iv. we have symbols which answer rather to the kingly title, as in chapter v. the same persons appear, discharging functions after a priestly type. In Revelation iv. the elders are crowned and enthroned; in chapter v. they have golden vials (or bowls) of odours (*i. e.*, incense), which are the prayers of the saints. In the one, therefore, their kingly place is more involved,—in the other their priestly occupation. This is never applied to ordinary angels as such. The only angel ever seen in priestly action is when the Lord Jesus assumes the character of an angel-priest (chapter viii.); not of course that He becomes a literal angel, but God was pleased, for reasons of sufficient weight, thus to represent Him at the altar under the trumpets.

Next we find that attention was directed both to what characterized the throne judicially, and also to the Holy Ghost as having a symbolic description suitable to the scene—seven lamps or torches of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Thus it is not the Holy Ghost in the gracious power which characterizes His relationship to the church, but in governmental judgment, because it is a question of a sinful guilty world—of the creature, and not the new creation.

So too we see that the four living creatures are brought

before us. "Before the throne," it is written, "there was a sea of glass like unto crystal." Instead of its being a laver of water to purify the unclean, it is a sea, not liquid, but of glass. It is fixed purity now. Hence it is no question of meeting what was contracted in this defiling world. Those that are here in relation to it have passed out of their failure and need; they are in heaven and already glorified. And I may just repeat what has been often said before, that all scripture testifies to glorified bodies, without a word about glorified spirits. The twenty-four elders do not mean those members of Christ who have gone by death into His presence. The numerical symbol in fact is inconsistent with such an idea—for this simple reason, that, interpret the twenty-four as you please, it must mean a complete company. Now the saints cannot be said to be complete in any sense whatsoever till Christ have come, who will translate all the Christians alive then on earth, with all the saints who had previously fallen asleep in Him, to be glorified with Himself above.

There is no time that you can look at the departed spirits, but there are some on earth who require to be added in order to exhibit the number complete. In point of fact, so far is scripture from ever representing the separate condition of the spirits as a complete state, that its testimony is distinctly adverse. The church is viewed as in a certain sense complete at any given moment on the earth, not because of the greater importance of those who are on the earth compared with such as are in heaven, but because the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven, and is on earth. This is the reason why, (He being the one bond of the

church,) where He is, the church must be. Accordingly there never can be any complete state of the church at any given moment in heaven, but on earth rather till Jesus come. But when we speak of absolute completeness, it is clear that this cannot be till the Lord come and has taken all the heavenly saints out of the world, and they go up into His presence above. Then there is completeness; and this is the state that is represented by the twenty-four elders. So that we have here, therefore, still more confirmation of what has been already pressed,—that the entire description pre-supposes the church condition done with, and a new state entered on. Such is the unforced meaning of this vision of the blessedness and glory of those who had been on earth, but are now glorified in heaven. It is a complete company in the fullest sense; the heads of the heavenly priesthood. They have passed, therefore, out of the need of the washing of water by the word. It is a sea, not of water, but of glass, like crystal. This stamps the fact in a most evident manner.

Further, we have to notice the cherubic symbol. “And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.” Thus there was perfect discernment conferred on them by God. The living creatures I understand to be symbolic of the agency—whatever may be the agents—that God employs in the execution of His judicial power. Consequently the qualities of power are those fitting and necessary for that execution. “The first was like a lion; the second like a calf (a young bull or steer); the third had the face as of a man; and the fourth was like a flying eagle.” We have thus majestic power, patient



endurance, intelligence, and rapidity, all which enter into the judicial dealings that follow.

The question arises, and a very interesting one it is, not what, but who, are these living creatures? We have seen the qualities in their agency; but who are the agents? This is a delicate point. At the same time I think that scripture gives adequate light, as to those who wait on God, for everything which it is important for us to know.

It will be observed that in chapter iv. (and it is a remarkable fact) there are no angels mentioned. You have the throne of God; you have the elders, and also the four living creatures, but not a word about angels. The living creatures celebrate God, not yet as the Most High, but as the "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." And when they do thus "give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth unto the ages of the ages, the twenty-four elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth unto the ages of the ages, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou createst all things, and because of thy will they were and were created." I give it in its exact form. There is this particular stamped on the elders, that they always speak with understanding. It will be true in its measure even of the Jewish remnant that are to be called after the rapture. They are designated as "the wise that shall understand:" so we know from Daniel and others. But the elders have a higher character, because they invariably enter into the reason of the thing. This is an exceedingly beautiful

feature, which I suppose also to be connected with the fact that they are called elders. They are those who have the mind of Christ. They apprehend the counsels and ways of God.

In chap. iv. we see that the living creatures and the elders are closely connected, but no more. We shall find in chap. v. that they join together. Not merely are they connected there but they positively combine. This is shown us in the case where the Lamb "takes the book, the four living creatures and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sing a new song." The remarkable fact that it is important to heed here is this. Chapter v. shows us for the first time the Lamb presented distinctly and definitely in the scene. It was not so even in chapter iv., where we have seen the display of the judicial glory of God in His various earthly or dispensational characters, save His millennial one, and of course not His special revelation to us now as Father. In itself we know that Jehovah God embraces equally the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But here the Holy Ghost is distinctively seen as the seven Spirits of God under a symbolic guise; here the Lord Jesus is not yet discriminated. The glorious vision of Him who sits on the throne may include therefore both the Father and the Son; it is rather God as such, than the revelation of personality—the general or generic idea, not personal distinction formally. But in chap. v. a challenge is made which at once displays the worth, victory, and peace of the Lamb, that holy earth-rejected Sufferer, whose blood has bought for God those who

were under the ruin of sin and misery. There is to be then the full blessing of man and the creature on God's part, yea, man not only delivered, but even before the deliverance is displayed led into the understanding of the mind and will of God. Christ is just as necessarily the wisdom of God as He is the power of God. Without Him no creature can apprehend, any more than a sinner knows salvation without Him. We need, and how blessed that we have, Christ for everything! Thus, whatever the glory of the scene before the prophet in chapter iv., that which follows shows us the wondrous person and way in which man is brought into the consciousness of the blessing, and the appreciation of the divine ways and glory.

"And I saw on the right hand of him that sat on the throne a roll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (chap. v. 1). The creature could not open these seals,—none anywhere. But the strong angel proclaims, and the Lord Jesus at length comes forward to answer the proclamation. He takes up the challenge, appearing after a sufficient space had proved the impotence of all others. The comfort assured to John by the elder is thus justified; for the elders always understand. And he sees the Lion of the tribe of Judah to be the Lamb, despised on earth, exalted in heaven, who advances and takes the roll out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. And then they all—living creatures and elders together—fell down before the Lamb with a new song.

It is striking that after this, as we are told, "I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders: and the num-

ber of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;" who said with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power." Here we have the angels, who are now distinctly and prominently brought forward. Why is this? How comes it that no angels appear in chap. iv.? And why is it that we have them in chap. v.? There is always the wisest reason in the ways of God of which scripture speaks, and we are encouraged by the Spirit to enquire humbly but trustfully. What is marked by it seems to be this: that the assumption of the book into the hands of the Lamb, and His preparing to open the seals, marks a change of administration. Up to that point of time, angels have held a sort of executory ministry of power from God. Where judgments were in question, or other extraordinary intervention on His part, angels were the instruments; whereas from this point of time, it appears to me that the Spirit of God marks the fact of a vast change, however they may still be employed during the interval of the last of Daniel's seventy weeks. It is providence yet, not manifested glory.

The title of the glorified saints is thus asserted. We know for certain, as a matter of doctrine in Heb. ii., that the world to come is to be put not under angels but the redeemed. Here it appears to me that the seer is admitted to a prophetic glimpse that falls in with the doctrine of St. Paul. In other words, when the Lamb is brought definitely into the scene, then, and not before, we see the elders and the living creatures united in the new song. As one company, they join in praising the Lamb. They sing, "Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed," and so on. Thus we have them

combined in a new fashion; and, what is more, the angels are now seen and definitely distinguished. Supposing, for instance, that previously, the administration of judgment was in the hand of angels, it is easily understood that they would not be distinguished from the living creatures in chap. iv.; because, in point of fact, the living creatures set forth the agencies of God's executory judgment; whereas in chap. v., if there be a change in administration, and the angels that used to be the executors are no longer so recognised as such in view of the kingdom, but the power is entrusted to the hands of the glorified saints, it is simple enough that the angels fall back, being eclipsed by the heirs, and no longer in the same position. If previously they might be understood to be included under the living creatures, they are henceforward to take their place simply as angels, and are therefore no longer comprehended under that symbol. This, the suggestion of another, appears to commend itself as a true explanation of the matter.

From this, if correct, as I believe it to be, it follows that the four living creatures might be at one time angels, and at another saints. What the symbol sets forth is not so much the persons that are entrusted with these judgments, as the character of the agencies employed. Scripture, however, affords elements to solve the question, first by the marked absence of angels, who, as we know, are the beings that God employed in His providential dealings with the world, and this both in Old Testament times, and still in the days of the New Testament. The church is only in course of formation; but when it shall be complete, when the



glorified saints are caught up, and the First-begotten is owned in His title, they too will be owned in theirs. For as the Lord is coming to take visibly the kingdom, we can readily understand that the change of administration is first made manifest in heaven before it is displayed upon earth. If this be correct, then the change is marked in chapter v. The general fact is in chapter iv.; the approaching change is anticipated in chapter v. This appears to be the most satisfactory way of accounting for that which is here brought before us.

All the results are celebrated for every creature when once the note is struck (ver. 13).

Next we come to the opening of the seals. Chapter vi. has a character of completeness about it, with this only exception,—that the seventh seal is the introduction to the trumpets in the beginning of chap. viii. This does not call for many words on the present occasion. “And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come.” Ought we to have here, and after the other three horses, the words “and see”? It appears that they are wanting in the best text\* in all these passages. In every one of the cases the sentence ought to be “come.” The difference comes to this, that “come and see” would be addressed to John; whereas according to the better MSS. the “come” is addressed by the living creature to the rider on the horse. Clearly this makes a considerable difference. One of the living creatures

\* Yet in every instance the Sinai MS. supports the inferior copies against the Alexandrian, and the Rescript of Paris with the better cursives, &c.

steps forward when the first seal is opened, and says, Come; and at once comes forth a rider on a white horse.

Let us inquire into the force of each severally. "I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him: and he went (or came) forth conquering and that he might conquer." It is the answer to the call. The first then comes forth, and the character of his action is prosperity and conquest. Everything shows this. It is the earliest state that the Spirit of God notices as brought about in the world. After the mighty change we have already seen to have taken place in heaven, there is a mighty conqueror that will appear here below. We are all aware that this has been applied to a great variety of things and persons. Sometimes it has been supposed to mean the triumphs of the gospel, sometimes Christ's coming again, and as often antichrist, and I know not what. But what I think we may safely gather from it is this, that God employs a conqueror who will carry everything before him.

It is not necessarily by bloodshed, as in the second seal, which gives us carnage if not civil war. Hence the rider is not on a white horse, the symbol of victory; but remounted on another, a red horse, with a commission to kill, and a great sword. Imperial power which subjugates is meant by the horse in every state; but in the first case imperial power seems to subject men bloodlessly. The measures are so successful—the name itself carries such weight with it—that, in point of fact, it is one onward career of conquest without necessarily involving slaughter. But in the second seal the great

point is "that they should slay one another." It was possibly even civil warfare. There the horse was red.

In the third seal it is a black horse, the colour of mourning. Accordingly we read now of a chœnix of wheat for a denarius, and three chœnixes of barley for a denarius. That is, the price was the rate of scarcity. The ordinary price a little while before we know to have been incomparably less; for notoriously a denarius would have procured as much as fifteen chœnixes. Now it is needless to say that fifteen times the ordinary price of wheat would make a serious difference; but however this may have been, certainly the rate current in St. John's day is not a question that is easily settled. Naturally rates differ. The increase of civilization and other causes tend to make it a little uncertain. That there is a difficulty in ascertaining with nicety the prices at this particular epoch is plain from the fact that men of ability and conscience have supported every possible variety of opinion—plenty, scarcity, and a fair supply at a just price; but I do not think it is worth while to spend more time on the point. The colour of the horse, to my mind, decisively proves what the nature of the case is. Mourning would be strange if it were either a time of plenty or one governed by a just price; black suits a time of scarcity. Some will be surprised to hear that each of these views has had defenders. There are only three possible ways of taking it; and each one of these has had staunch support. Every one of these different interpretations has been insisted on by learned men, who are as liable as others to waver sometimes to one side, sometimes to another. There is no certainty about them. The word of God makes the matter plain to a

simple mind. The unlettered in this country or any other cannot know much details about the price of barley or wheat at the time of St. John, or later; but he does see at once that the black colour is significant, especially as contrasted with white and red, and not at all indicative of joy or justice, but very naturally of distress; and therefore he feels bound to take this in company with the other points of the third horse and its rider.

The fourth seal was a pale or livid horse, the hue of death. Accordingly the name of its rider is Death, and Hades followed with him. To make the force still plainer, it is said that authority was given to him over the fourth of the earth, to slay with the sword, and with hunger, and with death (pestilence perhaps), and by the beasts of the earth.

The fifth seal shows us souls under the altar, who had been slain for the word of God, and for their testimony, who cried aloud for vengeance to the Sovereign Ruler. They are vindicated before God, but must wait: others, both their fellow-servants and their brethren, must be killed as they were ere that day comes.

The sixth seal marks a vast convulsion, a partial answer to the cry as I suppose. Many a person thinks that those in question are Christians. But if we look more clearly into the passage, we may learn that this again confirms the removal of the church to heaven before this. "How long, O Sovereign, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Is this a prayer, or desire according to the grace of the gospel? Reasoning is hardly needful on a point so manifest. I think that any one who under-

stands the general drift of the New Testament, and the special prayers there recorded by the Holy Ghost for our instruction, would be satisfied but for a false bias otherwise. Take Stephen's prayer, and our blessed Lord, the pattern of all that is perfect. On the other hand we have similar language elsewhere: but where? In the Psalms. Thus we have all the evidence that can be required. The evidence of the New Testament shows that these are not the sanctioned prayers of the Christian; the evidence of the Old Testament, that just such were the prayers of persons whose feelings and experience and desires were founded on Israelitish hopes.

Does not this exactly fall in with what we have already proved—that the heavenly glorified saints will have passed out of the scene, and that God will be at work in the formation of a new testimony, which will of course have its own peculiarities,—not of course obliterating the facts of the New Testament, but at the same time leading the souls of the saints more particularly into what was revealed of old, because God is going to accomplish what was predicted then? The time is approaching for God to take the earth. The great subject of the Old Testament is the earth blessed under the rule of the heavens, and Christ the head of both. The earth, and the earthly people Israel, and the nations, will then enjoy the days of heaven here below. Accordingly these souls show us their condition and hopes. They pray for earthly judgments. They desire not that their enemies should be converted, but that God should avenge their blood on them. Nothing can be simpler, or more sure than the inference. “And it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little



season, until both their fellow-servants and their brethren, that were to be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

This is an important intimation, as we shall see from what follows in the Apocalypse. They are told that they are not the only band of the faithful who are given up to a violent end: others must follow later. Till then, God is not going to appear for the accomplishment of that judgment for which they cried. They must wait therefore for that further, and, as we know, more furious outburst of persecution. After that, God will deal with the earth. Thus we have here the latest persecution, as well as the earlier one, of the Apocalyptic period distinctly given. The apostle Paul had spoken of himself as ready to be offered up: so these were and are seen therefore under the altar in the vision. They were renewed indeed, and understood what Israel ought to do; but they were clearly not on the ground of Christian faith and intelligence as we are. Of course it is a vision, but still a vision with weighty and plain intimations to us. They had the spirit of prophecy to form the testimony of Jesus. Judgment yet lingers till there was the predicted final outpouring of man's apostate rage, and then the Lord will appear and put down all enemies.

At the same time, as we have already seen passingly, the next seal shows that God was not indifferent meanwhile. The sixth seal may be regarded as a kind of immediate consequence of the foregoing cry. When opened, a vast shaking ensues,—a thorough concussion of everything above and below, set forth mystically, as in the previous seals. "The sun became black as sack-

cloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood ; and the stars of heaven fell on the earth, even as a fig tree, shaken by a mighty wind, casteth its untimely figs. And the heaven was removed as a scroll rolled up ; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." This is merely the appearance before the seer in the vision. We are not to suppose that heaven and earth will be physically confounded when the prediction is fulfilled. He saw all this before his eyes as signs, of which we have to consider the meaning. We have to find out by their symbolic use elsewhere what is intended here by the changes that passed over sun, moon, stars, and the earth in the vision. And the result of course depends on our just application of scripture by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Then we are told in plain language, not in figures, that "the kings of the earth, and the great and the rich, and the chiliarchs, and the mighty, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains." This it is well to heed, because it would be evident that if it meant that the heaven literally was removed as a scroll, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place, there could be no place to hide in. Thus to take it as other than symbolic representation would be to contradict the end by the beginning. This, then, is not the true force. Supposing heaven really to disappear, and the earth to be moved according to the import of these terms in a pseudo-literal way, how could the various classes of terrified men be saying to the mountains, "Fall on us and hide us?" It is plain, therefore, that the vision, like its predecessor, is symbolical ; that the prophet indeed

beheld these objects heavenly and earthly thus darkened and in confusion ; but that the meaning must be sought out on the ordinary principles of interpretation. To my mind, it represents a complete dislocation of all authority, high and low—an unexampled convulsion of all classes of mankind within its own sphere, the effect of which is to overturn all the foundations of power and authority in the world, and to fill men's minds with the apprehension that the day of judgment is come.

It is not the first time indeed that people have so dreaded, but it will be again worse than it has ever been. Such is the effect of the sixth seal when its judgment is accomplished, after the church is taken away to heaven, and indeed subsequent to a murderous persecution of the saints who follow us on earth. The persecuting powers and those subject to them will be visited judicially, and there will ensue a complete disruption of authority on the earth. The rulers will have misused their power, and now a revolution on a vast scale takes place. Such seems to me the meaning of the vision. The effect on men when they see the total overturning of all that is established in authority here below will be that they will think the day of the Lord is come. They will say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who is able to stand?" It is an error to confound their saying so with God's declaration. It is not He but they who cry that the great day of the wrath is come. There is no excuse for so mistaken an interpre-

tation. It is what these frightened multitudes exclaim; but the fact is that the great day does not arrive for a considerable space afterwards, as the Revelation itself clearly proves. The whole matter here is that men are so alarmed by all this visitation, that they think it must be His coming day, and they say so. It is very evident that the great day of His wrath is not yet come, because a considerable time after this epoch our prophecy describes the day of His coming. It is described in chaps. xiv., xvii., and especially xix. When it really arrives, so infatuated are the men of the world that they will fight against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them. Satan will have destroyed their dread when there is most ground for it.

After this, so far is the great day of His wrath from being come, that we find in the parenthesis of chap. vii. God accomplishing mighty works of saving mercy. The first is the sealing of 144,000 out of the tribes of Israel by an angel that comes from the sun-rising. Next there is vouchsafed to the prophet the sight of a crowd of Gentiles that none could number, "out of every nation, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Here it is not simply "salvation," but "salvation to God," in the quality of sitting upon the throne (we have seen in this book, His judicial throne). In other words, the ascription could not have been made before chapter iv. Its tenor supposes a vast change to have taken

place. It is not the fruit of a testimony during all or many ages. All this is merely men's imagination, without the smallest foundation in scripture. So far from its being a picture of the redeemed of all times, it is expressly said to be a countless throng out of Gentiles contrasted with Israel, and this in relation to God governing judicially. It is not universal therefore. These Gentiles stand in manifest contrast with the sealed out of Israel. One of the elders talked about them, and explained to the prophet, who evidently without this would have been at fault. If the elders mean the glorified saints, these Gentiles are not. Most assuredly they cannot be all saints, because the hundred and forty-four thousand of Israel we have seen expressly distinguished from them. Who are they and what? They are a multitude of Gentiles to be preserved by gracious power in these last days. They are not said to be glorified; nor is there reason to doubt that they are still in their natural bodies. When they are said to be before the throne, it proves nothing inconsistent with this; because the woman, for instance, in chapter xii., is also described as seen in heaven; but, you must remember, this is only where the prophet saw them in the vision. We are not necessarily to gather that they were to be in heaven; John saw them there, but whether it might mean that they were, or were not to be, in heaven, is another question. This depends on other considerations that have to be taken into account, and it is for want of due waiting on God, and of adequately weighing the surrounding circumstances, that such serious mistakes are made in these matters.

In this case it is perfectly plain to my mind that they



are not heavenly as such. There are weighty objections. First of all, we find them definitely contra-distinguished from Israel, who clearly are on earth, and thus naturally this company would be on earth too,—the one Jewish, and the other Gentile. Next they come out of the great tribulation. Far from its being a general body in respect to all time, this proves that it is a very peculiar though countless group,—that it is only persons who can be preserved and blessed of God during the epoch of the great tribulation.

In the millennial time there will be a great ingathering of the Gentiles; but these are not millennial saints. They are saints from among the Gentiles, who will be called to the knowledge of God by the preaching of the “everlasting gospel,” or the “gospel of the kingdom,” of which we hear both in the gospels and in the Revelation. We all know that the Lord Himself tells the disciples that this “gospel of the kingdom” shall be “preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations” (or all the Gentiles); “and then shall the end come.” Now this is just the very time spoken of here. It is clearly not a general summary of what is going on now, but a description of what is yet to be, specially just before the end when the great tribulation bursts out. And there is the fruit of divine grace even then in this vast crowd from the Gentiles, the details of whose description fall in with and confirm what has been remarked already.

I have already drawn attention to the fact that they are distinguished from the elders. If these mean the church, those do not; and as all admit that the elders represent the glorified saints, the inference seems to

me quite plain and certain. Undoubtedly we might have the same body represented at different times by a different symbol, but hardly by two symbols at the same time. We may have, for instance, Christians set forth by a train of virgins at one time, and by the bride at another; but in the same parable there is a careful avoidance of confusion; and no such incongruous mixture occurs in scripture. It is not ever found amongst sensible men, not to speak of the word of God. So here the prophet tells us that one of the elders answers his own enquiry, "What are these arrayed in white robes? and whence come they?" "These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Clearly therefore they are believers or saints. "Therefore are they before the throne of God," which I take to be not a description of their local place but of their character,—that it is in view of, and in connection with, the throne. This, we have seen, makes it to be limited to the particular time, and not vague or general; because the throne here differs from what it is now, and the millennial throne will be different from both. It is that very aspect of the throne which may be called its Apocalyptic character, to distinguish it from what was before or will be afterwards.

Again, not merely are they there themselves, but it is said, "He that sitteth on the throne shall"—not exactly "dwell among them," but—"tabernacle over them." It is the gracious shelter of the Lord's care and goodness that is set forth by it. This is of importance: because, though God now dwells by the Holy Ghost

in the church as His habitation through the Spirit, it will not be so when these Gentiles will be called to the knowledge of Himself. There will be—what is more suited to their character—His protection. Of old God had His pillar of cloud, which was a defence and a canopy over the camp of Israel (though He also dwelt in their midst); here, too, He graciously shows it is not alone the sealed of Israel that enjoy His care, but these poor Gentiles. It is added that “they shall not hunger any more, neither thirst any more; nor in any wise shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat.” I confess to you that I think such a promise is much more exactly adapted to a people about to be on the earth, than to men in a glorified state above. Where would be the propriety of a promise to glorified people not to hunger or thirst any more? If to a people on earth, we can all understand the comfort of its assurance. “For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall tend them, and shall lead them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Then comes at length the seventh seal. This is important, because it guards us effectually against the idea that the sixth seal goes down to the end, as many excellent men have imagined in ancient and modern times. It is clearly incorrect. The seventh seal is necessarily after the sixth. If there is an order in the others, we must allow that the seventh seal introduces seven trumpets which follow each other in succession like the seals. These are described from chap. viii. and onward. “I saw the seven angels who stand before

God; and to them were given seven trumpets." Then we see a remarkable fact, already alluded to—an angel of peculiarly august character found before the altar. "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given him much incense, that he might give [efficacy] to the prayers of all the saints at the golden altar which was before the throne." Hence it follows that, while there are glorified saints above, saints are not wanting on earth who are sustained by the great High Priest, however little their light, or great their trial. Thus we have here the clear intimation that while the glorified are above, there will be others in their natural bodies yet accredited as saints here below.

But there is another trait which demands our attention. Under the trumpets the Lord Jesus assumes the angelic character. Everything is angelic under the trumpets. We no longer hear of Him as the Lamb. As such He had opened the seals; but here as the trumpets were blown by angels, so the angel of the covenant (who is the second person in the Trinity, as He is commonly called) falls back on that which was so familiar in the Old Testament presentation of Himself. Not of course that He divests Himself of His humanity: this could not be; or if it could be imagined, it would be contrary to all truth. The Son of God since the incarnation always abides the man Christ Jesus. From the time that He took manhood into union with His glorious person, never will He cut it off. But this evidently does not prevent His assuming whatever appearance is suited to the prophetic necessity of the case; and this I conceive is just what we find here

under the trumpets. We may observe that an increasingly figurative style of language is employed. All other objects become more distant in this series of visions than before; and even Christ Himself is seen more vaguely, *i.e.*, not in His distinct human reality, but in an angelic appearance.

Here then it is written that "the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it unto the earth." The effect was "voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and an earthquake." Further, in this new septenary we must prepare ourselves for even greater visitations of God's judgments. There were lightnings and voices and thunders in chap. iv., but there is more now. We find, besides these, an earthquake added. The effect among men becomes more intense.

"And the first sounded his trumpet, and there was hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth." This I take as a violent down-pouring of displeasure from God. Hail implies this. Fire, we know, is the constant symbol of God's consuming judgment, and it is mingled with blood. It is destruction to life in the point of view that is intended here. We have to consider whether it is simple physical decease or dissolution in some special respect.

It will be noticed in these divine visitations that the third part is particularly introduced. What is the prophetic meaning of "the third"? It appears to answer to what we have given us in Rev. xii. (*i.e.*, the properly Roman or western empire). I believe that it would thus convey the consumption of the Roman empire in the west. Of course one cannot be ex-



pected in a general sketch to enter on a discussion of the grounds for this view. It is enough now to state what one believes to be the fact. If this be so, at least the earlier trumpets (though not these only) are a specific visitation of judgment on the western empire of Rome. Not only was this visited, but "the third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up." This is a contrast. The dignitaries within that sphere were visited, but there was also a universal interference with the prosperity of men here below.

"And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea : and the third of the sea became blood ; and the third of the creatures which were in the sea, which had life, died ; and the third of the ships were destroyed." It was in this case a great earthly power, which as a divine judgment dealt with the masses in a revolutionary state to their destruction. Thus not merely the world under stable government, but that which is or when it is in a state of agitation and disorder ; and we find the same deadly effects here also, putting an end, it would seem, to their trade and commerce.

"The third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters." Here the fall of a great dignitary or ruler, whose influence was judicially turned to embitter all the springs and channels of popular influence, is before us. The sources and means of intercourse among men are here visited by God's judgment.

The fourth angel sounded, and the third of the sun and moon and stars was smitten ; that is to say, the

governing powers—supreme, derivative, and subordinate—all come under God's judgment—all within the west.

“And I saw, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to those that dwell on the earth, by reason of the remaining voices of the trumpet of the three angels that are about to sound.” It is a vivid image of rapidly approaching judgments, “angel” being substituted for the better reading “eagle” by scribes who did not appreciate the symbolic style of the prophecy here.

In chapter ix. the two next, or fifth and sixth trumpets, are described with minute care, as indeed these are two of the woe trumpets. There remains the third woe trumpet, the last of the seven, which is set forth at the end of chapter xi., where we close.

The first of the woe trumpets consists of the symbolic locusts. For that they are not to be understood in a merely literal way is clear, if only for this reason, that they are expressly said not to feed on that which is the natural food of locusts. This creature is simply the descriptive sign of these marauders.

To another remark I would call your attention: that the first woe trumpet answers in the way of contrast to the hundred and forty-four thousand that were sealed of Israel; as the second woe trumpet, namely, that of the Euphratean horsemen, answers by a similar contrast to the countless multitude of the Gentiles. As some perhaps may think that this contrast must be vague and indefinite, I shall therefore endeavour to make my meaning plainer. It is expressly said that the locusts of the

vision were to carry on their devastations, except on those that were sealed. Here then is an allusion clearly to those whom God set apart from Israel in chapter vii.

On the other hand, in the Euphratean horsemen we see far more of aggressive power, though there is also torment. But torment is the main characteristic of the locust woe; the horsemen woe is more distinctively the onward progress of imperial power, described in most energetic colours. They fall on men and destroy them; but here "the third" re-appears. According to the force given already, this would imply that the woe falls on the Gentiles indeed, and more particularly on the western Roman empire.

It seems also plain that these two woes represent what will be verified in the early doings of the antichrist in Judea. The first or the locust raid consists of a tormenting infliction. Here accordingly we have Abaddon, the destroyer, who is set forth in a very peculiar fashion as the prince of the bottomless pit, their leader. It is not of course the beast yet fairly formed; but we can quite comprehend that there will be an early manifestation of evil, just as grace will effect the beginning of that which is good in the remnant. Here then we have these initiatory woes. First of all a tormenting woe that falls on the land of Israel, but not upon those that were sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel. On the other hand, we find the Euphratean horsemen let loose on the Roman empire, overwhelming the Gentiles, and in particular that empire, as the object of the judgment of God.

Such is the general scope of chapter ix. As to enter-

ing into particulars, it would be quite out of the question to-night. Other opportunities do not fail for learning more minute details, and their application.

Chapter x. in the trumpets answers to chap. vii. in the seals. It forms an important parenthesis, that comes in between the sixth and seventh trumpets, just as the sealing chapter (vii.) came in between the sixth and seventh seals: so orderly is the Apocalypse. Accordingly we have here again the Lord, as it seems to me, in angelic garb. As before in high-priestly function, He is the angel with royal claim here. A mighty angel comes down from heaven, clothed with a cloud—the special sign of Jehovah's majesty: none but He has a title to come thus clothed. And, further, the rainbow is on His head; it is not now a question of round the throne: here there is a step in advance. He is approaching the earth; He is about to lay speedy claim to that which is His right. "The rainbow was on his head, and his face was as the sun"—supreme authority; "and his feet as pillars of fire"—with firmness of divine judgment. "And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot on the sea, and his left on the earth, and cried with a loud voice, as a lion roareth."

John was going to write, but is forbidden. The disclosures were to be sealed for the present. "And the angel whom I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for the ages of the ages, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things that are therein, that there should be no

longer delay." There was no more to be any lapse of time allowed; but God would terminate the mystery of His present seeming inaction as to government. He is now allowing the world, with slight check, to go on its own way. Men may sin, and, as far as direct intervention is concerned, God appears not, though there may be interferences exceptionally. But the time is coming when God will surely visit sin, and this immediately,—when there will be no toleration for a moment of anything which is contrary to Himself. This is the blessed age to which all the prophets look onward; and the angel here swears that the time is approaching. There is going to be no more delay; "but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God also shall be finished." The mystery here is, not Christ and the church, but God's allowing evil to go on in its present course with apparent impunity.

And then John is told at the end of the chapter that he must "prophesy again before peoples, and nations, and tongues, and many kings." The meaning of this more clearly appears soon. There is a kind of appendix of prophecy where he renews his course for especial reasons.

Meanwhile, I would just call your attention to the contrast between the little book which the prophet here takes and eats, and the great book we have seen already sealed with seven seals. Why a little book? and why open? A little book, because it treats of a comparatively contracted sphere; and open, because things are no longer to be described in the mysterious guise in which the seals and yet more the trumpets set them



out. All is going to be made perfectly plain in what falls under it here. This is the case accordingly in chapter xi.

The angel proceeds to say, "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given to the Gentiles." Jerusalem appears in the foreground. This is the centre now, though the beast may ravage there. "And I will give\* to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth." Their task is for a time comparatively short—for three years and a half. "These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the Lord of the earth." The witnesses are two, not because in point of fact they are historically to be limited to only two individuals, but as meaning the least adequate testimony according to the law. To make it two literally seems to me a mistaken way of interpreting prophecy, and the Apocalypse in particular, as being eminently symbolical, which Daniel also is in measure. To forget this practically is to involve oneself in clouds of error and inconsistency.

Thus, for instance, one hears occasionally, for the purpose of illustrating the Revelation, a reference to Isaiah, Jeremiah, or the like; but we must remember that these prophecies are not in their structure symbolical, and therefore the reasoning that is founded on the books and style of Jeremiah or Isaiah (Ezekiel being partly symbolical, partly figurative) cannot decide for Daniel

\* Probably here, as in Rev. viii. 3, the word implies "efficacy" or "power," as the translators saw in one text if not in the other.

or the Apocalypse. Here then are symbols which have a language of their own. Thus the regular meaning of "two," symbolically, is competent testimony—enough and not more than enough. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." According to Jewish law a case could not be decided by one witness; there must be at least two for valid proof and judgment.

The Lord shows us that He will raise up an adequate testimony in these days. Of how many the testimony will consist is another matter, on which I have little or nothing to say. One can no more reason on this than on the twenty-four glorified elders. Who would thence infer that there will be only so many glorified ones? and why should one think that there will be only two to testify? However this may be, those who are raised to witness are to prophesy for a limited time. "And if any man desire to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man desire to hurt them, he must in this manner be killed."

Is this then, I ask, the testimony of the gospel? Is it thus the Lord protects those that are the preachers of the gospel of His own grace? Did fire ever proceed out of the mouths of evangelists? Did a teacher ever devour his enemies? Was it on this principle Ananias and Sapphira fell dead? Are these the ways of the gospel? It is evident then that we are here in a new atmosphere—that an altogether different state of things is before us from that which reigned during the church condition, though even then sin might be unto death in peculiar cases. I refer to no more proofs now, thinking

that enough has been given. "These have authority to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy." That is, they are something like Elijah; and they have "authority over the waters to turn them to blood." In this respect they resemble Moses also. This does not mean that they are Moses and Elias personally; but that the character of their testimony is similar, and the sanctions of it are such as God gave in the days of those two honoured servants of old. "And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them." They are preserved in spite of the beast, till their work is done; but directly their testimony is concluded, the beast is allowed to overcome them. It is just as it was with the Lord. The utmost pressure was brought against Him in His service. So their hour, we may say, has not yet come, just as He said of Himself before them. There was all possible willingness to destroy them long before, but somehow it could not be done; for the Lord protected them till they had done their mission. We see this in the character of grace which filled the Lord Jesus—which essentially belonged to Him. Here we meet with the earthly retributive dealing of the Old Testament. The Spirit will form them thus; and no wonder, because in fact God is recurring to that which He promised then, but has never yet performed. He is going to perform it now. He does not merely purpose to gather people for heavenly glory; He will govern on earth the Jews and the Gentiles in their several places—Israel nearest to Himself. He must have an earthly people as well as a family on high. When the heavenly

saints are changed, then He begins with the earthly. He will never mix them all up together. This would make nothing but the greatest confusion.

“And their corpse shall lie on the Broadway of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” It was Jerusalem, but spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, because of the wickedness of the people and their prince. It had no less abominations than Sodom; it had all the darkness and the moral bondage of Egypt, but it was really the place where their Lord had been crucified, *i.e.*, Jerusalem. So the witnesses fell, and men in various measures showed their satisfaction. “And [some] from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations see their corpse three days and a half, and do not suffer their corpses to be put into a tomb. And they that dwell on the earth rejoice over them, or make merry, and shall send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those that dwell on the earth.” But after the three days and a half God’s power raises up these slain witnesses, and they ascend to heaven in the cloud, and their enemies behold them. “And in that hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain seven thousand names of men: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past; behold, the third woe cometh quickly.”

Lastly we have the seventh trumpet. This is important for understanding the structure of the book. The seventh trumpet brings us down to the close in a general way. This is quite plain, though often overlooked. “And

the seventh angel sounded ; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world of our Lord and of his Christ is come." You must translate it a little more exactly, and with a better text too. The true meaning is this: "The kingdom of the world" (or "the world-kingdom," if our tongue would admit of such a phrase) "of our Lord and of his Christ is come." It is not merely power in general conferred in heaven, but "the world-kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ is come, and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, that sit before God on their thrones, fell on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God the Almighty, that art, and that wast ; because thou hast taken thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come."

Here, it will be observed, the end of the age is supposed to be now arrived. It is not merely frightened kings and peoples who say so, but now it is the voice of those who know in heaven. Further, it is "the time of the dead that they should be judged." It is not a question here of the saints caught up to heaven, but a later hour, "that thou shouldest give reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to those that fear thy name." Not a word is said here about taking them to heaven, but of recompensing them. There will be no such thing as the conferring of reward till the public manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The taking of those changed out of the scene is another association of truth. The reward will fail to none that fear the Lord's name, small and great. He will also "destroy those that destroy the earth."



This is the true conclusion of chapter xi. The next verse (19), beyond a question to my mind, though arranged in our Bibles as the end of this chapter, is properly the beginning of a new series. I shall therefore not treat of it to-night.

## XX.

### THE REVELATION.

Chaps. xi. 19-xvi.

WE begin now what may be called the second volume of the Revelation. The prophetic part of the book divides into two portions at this point. This is another land-mark that cannot be despised, if we would acquaint ourselves with its structure and the bearing of its contents. And it is absolutely requisite to have, at any rate, a generally correct understanding of its outline; else we are in imminent risk of making confusion, the moment we venture to put the parts together, or to form anything like a connected view of that which it conveys to us. The meaning will be made plainer, if I repeat that the seventh trumpet, which was the closing scene before us, brings us down to the end in a general way.

This is constantly the habit of prophecy: take, for instance, our Lord's prophecy in Matthew xxiv., where, first of all, we are given the broad outline as far as verse 14—the "gospel of the kingdom" preached in all the world for a testimony to all nations; and then the end comes. Having thus brought us down to the close in a comprehensive manner, the Lord turns back, and specifies a particular part of that history in a confined

sphere, namely, from the time that the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place. This clearly is some time before the end. It does not indeed go back absolutely to the beginning, but it returns a certain way, in order to set forth a far closer and more precise view of the appalling state of things that will be found in Jerusalem before the end comes.

Just so is it in the Revelation. The seals and the trumpets which follow one another conduct us from the time that the church is seen in heaven glorified till judgment closes, *i.e.* "the time of the dead, even that they should be judged," and the day of wrath upon the earth. Evidently this is the end. Then, in the portion which begins with the last verse of chapter xi., we return for a special prophecy. The prophet had been told that he must prophesy again before many people and kings; and I suppose that this is the prophesying again.

So the temple of God is now seen to be open. It is not a door opened in heaven to give us the general view of what was to take place on the earth as regarded in the mind of God. This John did see, the general view being now closed; and we enter on a narrower line of things. The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant. It is the resumption therefore of the old links with His ancient people Israel. At the same time it is not yet the day of blessedness for the Jew. Nor is heaven itself opened for Jesus, attended by risen saints, to appear for the judgment of the beast and the false prophet with their train. It is a transition state of things. When God deigns to look upon and gives us to see the ark of His covenant, He is going to assert His fidelity to the people,

Of old He gave promises, and will shortly accomplish all which had been assured to their fathers. The ark of His covenant is the sign of the unfailing certainty of that to which He bound Himself.

“And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings,” and besides not “an earthquake” only, but “great hail.” In the first scene in the fourth chapter, when the door was seen open in heaven, there were “lightnings, and voices, and thunderings,” but there was not even an earthquake. In chapter viii. this addition appears. Now besides there is hail. Clearly, therefore, we are coming to far greater detail in the way of judgments from heaven on the earth.

Then the first sign was beheld above. “There appeared a great sign in heaven.” We are not to suppose that when the prophecy is fulfilled, any woman will be seen either in heaven or elsewhere as its accomplishment. This is a fertile source of mistake in the interpretation of these visions. Her being seen in heaven shows that it is not a mere history of what is taking place on earth, but that it is all viewed in God’s mind. Consequently it is seen above. In point of fact, what the woman represents will be Israel on the earth. The woman is a symbol of the chosen people viewed as a whole, for a future state of things that God means to establish here below. She was “clothed with the sun.” Supreme authority is to be seen now connected with Israel, instead of her being in a state of desolation, down-trodden by the Gentiles. “And the moon under her feet” is an allusion, I suppose, to her old condition of legal ordinances, which, instead of governing her, are now subject to her—under her feet. How aptly the

moon sets forth the reflected light of the Mosaic system is evident to any thoughtful mind. In the millennium this will not be wholly out of sight as now under Christianity, but re-appear: only it will be in manifest subordination, as we may see in Ezekiel's prophecy. "And upon her head a crown of twelve stars." There is the evidence of human authority in the way of administration here below. In short, whether it be supreme, derivative, or subordinate authority, she is seen with all attached to her. Israel is therefore the manifest vessel of the mighty purposes of God for the earth; and God so looks at her and presents her to us. Thus it is as complete a change as can be conceived for Israel. But this is not all. "She was with child, and crieth, travailing in birth, in pain to be delivered." It is not yet the day for joyous and triumphant accomplishment of the divine purpose, when before Zion travails she is to bring forth, and before her pain come she is to be delivered of a man-child. There is weakness and suffering yet, but all is secured, and the end is pledged.

Then there is another sign; namely, "a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads." It is Satan, but here invested with the form of the most determined and successful enemy that Israel ever had; for bad as was the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar, it is evident that the Roman power trod down Jerusalem with a far more tremendous and permanent tyranny. This therefore makes the unfolding of this double sign so much the more striking. It is not that she is delivered yet; but she is seen by the prophet according to the mind of God. This is to be her place,—a mighty encouragement, considering what



she must pass through before it is all realized. Before this is effected, the enemy is shown in his character of rebellious apostate power. The dragon has seven heads—*i. e.*, the completeness of ruling authority; and ten horns,—not exactly completeness, but at any rate a very large distribution approaching it, in the instruments of the power wielded in the west. Man is never thus complete. What God gave the woman we saw—twelve stars. The dragon has only ten horns. There was a full succession of all the various forms of government, which I suppose to be referred to in the seven heads; but God would not give it that completeness of administrative power even in form which belonged to the woman. All will be in due order when the Lord Jesus takes the government of the earth into His hands in the age to come. “Verily I say unto you, That ye who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The twelve apostles of the Lamb are destined to this special place of honourable trust.

“His tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven.” Here is what seems to show that the third part has a distinct connection with the Roman empire. We saw the third part for the first time in the trumpets, both in the four earlier trumpets and also in the sixth. I have no doubt the Roman empire is particularly in view; and by the Roman empire we are to understand what was properly Roman—the western portion, not what the Romans actually possessed, because they conquered a great deal that belonged to Greece for instance, and Babylon, and Medo-Persia. This was far east; but

the properly Roman part was western Europe. There the dragon's power was particularly felt. It "drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them unto the earth; and the dragon stands before the woman that was about to bring forth, that he might devour her child as soon as she should bring forth. And she brought forth a male son, who is about to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne."

There are some things that require explanation here. First of all, a notion prevails that the woman is the church. There may be some Christians now present who have been so taught. A few words, I think, are quite sufficient to dispel the illusion. The church is never represented as a mother in scripture: still less could it be the mother of Christ. Viewed as a woman, the church is the bride of Christ, not His mother; whereas the Jewish body may be truly represented as His mother in symbol. Christ, as man, came of the Jews after the flesh. Accordingly, it is very plain that He is the one here described as the male. The same truth is most evident from the scriptures, whether we take the psalms or the prophets. "Unto us," Isaiah says, "a child is born, a son is given." Again, in the second psalm, we find that the one who is not merely the child of Israel, but acknowledged and honoured by God Himself as the Son, was to rule the nations with a rod of iron. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Lord Jesus is the one here prominent as the male child.

This, then, furnishes an unquestionable and important key to the meaning of the scene we are now

entering upon. The woman represents Israel in the mind of God,—Israel in its full corporate character.

Another remark seems to me just. Although Christ, I have no doubt, is referred to as the man-child born of Israel, it may be no small difficulty at first sight to some minds how to bring in the birth of Christ in this chapter. Indeed, it is a very fair question, and ought to be met. Let it then be observed, that here the Spirit of God is not proceeding with the course of the prophecy. I have already explained that He goes back. Consequently, so far all is perfectly open as to the point of time to which He returns. And another thing should be taken into account—that in this portion there is no date serving to fix the time when the birth of the man-child takes place. But then it may be asked, why should the birth of the man-child be introduced here, seeing that it was a patent fact that the Lord had been born, had lived, and died, and gone to heaven long before? There was nothing new to tell. All this was long and well known through the gospel, as well as in oral teaching to the Christians; why then should it be set forth so strangely in this prophecy? The reason I believe to be, that God desired in this very striking manner to rehearse it mystically, and not at all in full open statement, so as to combine it with His translation to heaven and to His own throne. There was a further link—with the re-opening of God's dealings with the Jews, and the eventual restoration of the nation. All are introduced here together.

Thus it is plain that God is not at all disposing these matters now as a question of time, but of connexion with Christ their centre. John is going to

enter into the final scenes after this ; but before this is done, we have God's counsel shown about Israel. This brings forward the devil in his evil opposition to that counsel ; for it was surely what the adversary most of all feared. Satan invariably opposes Christ with greater tenacity of purpose and hatred and pride than any other. Recognizing in Him the bruiser of himself and the deliverer of man and creation, there is a constant antagonism between Satan and the Son of God that is familiar to us all. But there is more than this : Satan sets himself against His connexion with the poor and despised people of Israel. Nevertheless, before God openly espouses the part of Israel, there is the remarkable fact that Christ is caught up to Him and to His throne. Not a word is said of His life ; not a word even about His death and resurrection. As far as this passage goes, one might suppose the Lord caught up on high as soon as He was born. This shows us how remarkably mystical the statement is. It is history neither anticipated nor in fact. Had it been an historical summary, we must have had His life noticed with those mighty events on which all hopes for the universe depend. All this is entirely passed over. The reason, I think, is just this, that it intimates to us, as in Old Testament prophecy, how the Lord and His people are wrapped up, as it were, in the very same symbol ; even as, in a yet more intimate way, what is said about Christ applies to the Christian.

On this principle then I cannot but consider that the rapture of the man-child to God and His throne involves the rapture of the church in itself. The explanation why it is thus introduced here depends on

the truth that Christ and the church are one, and have a common destiny. Inasmuch as He went up to heaven, so also the church is to be caught up. "So also is Christ," says the apostle Paul, when speaking of the church; for we must naturally suppose the allusion is to the body rather than to the head. He does not say, so also is the church, but "so also is Christ." In a similar spirit St. John, in this prophecy, shows us first of all the male child taken to a place in heaven entirely outside the reach of Satan's malice. If this be so, and granted it has a remarkable bearing on what has been already asserted as to the book: we here begin over again, with a particular point of view as the object of the Holy Ghost in this latter portion. Before doing so, John gives us first the general purpose of God about the Jews.

This is strictly in order. We might have thought that the more natural way would be first of all to state the rapture of the man-child; but not so, God always does and describes things in the wisest and best method. The fact is that Christ being born of Israel, there is and ought to be first set forth the tracing of His connexion with Israel. The next fact is the devil's opposition to the counsels of God, and hindrance for the time being, which gives occasion to the Lord Himself taking His place in heaven, and eventually to the church following Him into heaven. After this comes back on the scene the Lord's intention to make way for the effectuating of His counsels as to Israel and the earth. In short, therefore, the first portion of the chapter is distinctly a mystical representation of the Lord's relationship with Israel and of His removal out of the scene—the effect



of the antagonism of Satan ; but it also gives room for God's binding up, as it were, with Christ's disappearance in heaven the church's following Him there in due time. For the church is united to Christ. In this way the rapture of the man-child is not a mere historical fact. Christ's ascension to heaven is brought in here because it contains as a consequence the church's subsequent removal to be with Him where He is, His body forming one and the same mystic man before God, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

If this then be borne in mind, the whole subject is considerably cleared. "She brought forth a male son, to rule all nations with a rod of iron." There is not the slightest difficulty in applying this to the man-child, viewed not personally and alone but mystically ; and the less, because this very promise is made to the church in Thyatira, or rather to the faithful there. It will be remembered that at the end of Rev. ii. it was expressly said that the Lord would give to him that overcame power over the nations, and he should rule them with a rod of iron, just as He Himself received of His Father. Does not this most strongly confirm the same view ? "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should nourish her there a thousand two hundred [and] threescore days."

In verse 7 we have a new scene ; and here we come much more to facts,—not to counsels of God or to principles viewed in His mind, but to positive facts ; and first of all from above, as later on we shall find effects and changes on the earth. "And there was war in heaven : Michael and his angels to war with the

dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast [down], the ancient serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, who deceiveth the whole world, was cast unto the earth, and his angels were cast with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast [down], who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony, and loved not their life unto death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them." It is evident that at this time persons are spoken of as dwelling in heaven who sympathise deeply with their suffering brethren on earth. Such is the incontestable fact; and soon after Satan will have lost that access to the presence of God in the quality of accuser of the brethren that he had previously possessed; nor will he ever regain the highest seat of his power which is then lost. He is no longer able to fill heaven with his bitter taunts and accusations of the saints of God.

"Woe," however, it is added at this time, "to the earth and to the sea! for the devil has come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath a short season." This clearly connects the dispossession of Satan from his heavenly seat with the last crisis of Jews and Gentiles at the end of the present age. We find here the hidden reason. Why should there be such an unwonted storm of persecution? why such tremendous doings of Satan here below for a short time,

for three years and a half, before the close? The reason is here explained. Satan cannot longer accuse above; accordingly he does his worst below. He is cast down to earth, and never regains the heavens. Again, he will be banished from the earth, as we shall find, into the bottomless pit by and by; and then, although let loose thence for a short time, it is only for his irremediable ruin; for he is cast then (not merely into the pit or abyss, but) into the lake of fire, whence none ever comes back.

Such is the revealed course of the dealings of God with the great enemy of men from first to last.

From verse 13 the history is pursued not from the heavens, but on the earth. "And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the male [child]. And to the woman were given two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished there a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." Thus power is given to escape, rapid means of flight from Satan's persecution. It is not power to withstand Satan, and fight the battle out with him, but the facility given to flee from his violence. This seems to be what is meant by the two wings of the great eagle—a figure of vigorous means of escape. That which is in nature the most energetic image of flight is vividly applied to the case before us.

Then we find the enemy, baffled by God's provision, using other efforts. "And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood." That is, he here endeavours to stir up the nations (such as are, I suppose, in a state of disorganisation) to over-

whelm the Jews. In vain ; for “the earth”—what was under settled government at this time—“helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, that keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus.” By these are meant such of the Jews as will be remarkable for their power of testimony. The woman represents the more general idea of that people. The remnant of her seed are the witnessing portion. You must bear in mind that all the Jews of that day will by no means have the same spiritual power. There will be differences. Some will be much more energetic and intelligent than others. Satan hastens therefore, and endeavours to put down those that seem most useful as the vessels of the testimony of Jesus.

This accordingly leads to the plans that Satan sets up for the purpose of accomplishing his long-cherished design of supplanting not only gospel and law, but the testimony to the kingdom of God in the world. And there are two especial methods which Satan will adopt, suited to catch a twofold class of men who are never wanting in this world—natural men, some of whom like power, as others like religion. I am not now speaking of any who are born of God ; but it is clear that man’s heart runs either after intellect and power, or into religious formality. The devil will therefore put forward two main instruments as leaders of systems that express human nature on either side, exactly suiting what the

heart of man seeks and will have. Thus Satan has designed from the beginning to set up himself in man as God. For he too will work by man, as God Himself is pleased to develop all His wondrous ways and counsels in man. As the Lord Jesus is not only a divine person but the expression of the divine glory no less than of His grace; and as the church is the object of His love in heavenly blessedness, and Israel for the earth; so the enemy (who cannot originate but only corrupt the truth, and lie by a sort of profane imitation of the counsels of God) will have his beasts no less certainly than God has His Lamb. In Rev. xiii. this is made plain. There are these two beasts; the first civil power, the second religion, and both apostate.

“And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns.” The beast that emerges from the revolutionary Roman world is just adapted for the dragon to fill with opposition to the purposes of God. In chapter xii. the dragon was seen similarly characterized as the beast. Both have the forms of power peculiar to the Roman empire. But there is a difference also: “And upon his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy.” The dragon has the diadems on his heads; the beast shows us more the actual facts—the horns crowned. The dragon represents the enemy of Christ in his political employment of the Roman empire, and this from first to last; so that the heads or successive forms of power are said to be crowned, not the horns, which were only as a fact to be developed before the close of its history—at the earliest not before the Gothic barbarians broke up the empire of the west. On the



other hand, in the beast of chap. xiii. we see, not merely the hidden spirit of evil making use of the power of Rome in its various changes, but the empire in its final state when the deadly wound done to the imperial head was healed, and Satan shall have given to it thus revived his power, his throne, and great authority. Now this is the very time when the ten horns receive authority as kings; it is simultaneously and continuously with the beast, as chap. xvii. informs us; and hence the horns of the beast are seen crowned (not merely the heads, as in the dragon's case previously).

Further, the beast is described afterwards in remarkable terms, which allude to the beasts so well known in Daniel vii. "And the beast which I saw was like a leopardess, and its feet were as of a bear, and its mouth as a lion's." Here we have certain qualities that resemble the three first-named beasts of the prophet Daniel. Though Satan does not originate, he adopts whatever will suit of that which has been, and endeavours by this most singular combination to bring out the beast or fourth empire (for there is none to succeed) so as to surpass for the last days everything known of old.

What is meant by a beast? An imperial system or empire, but withal refusing to recognize God above. Man was made to own Him, and alone does, as taught of God. Man alone of all beings in the earth was made to look up to One above, and is responsible to do the will of God. The beast does not look up but down; it has no sense of an unseen superior. "The fool hath said in his heart that there is no God." In principle this is true of every unrenewed man; but here it is the more tremendous, because an empire ought to be the

reflection of the authority that God in His providence has conferred on it. No empire has avoided the moral sentence implied in the symbols, but this beast will go beyond all that have ever arisen. At the time that the prophecy was given the fourth beast was in existence ; but the prophet was given to see that out of a state of political convulsion, just before the last three years and a half, and connected with Satan's expulsion from heaven by the power of God, this beast rises up out of the sea. That is, there will be a state of total confusion in the west, and an imperial power will rise up. This is the one here described : "And I saw one of its heads as it were wounded to death ; and its deadly wound was healed : and all the world wondered after the beast." It is not hard to see sufficient grounds for gathering that the wounded head was the imperial form of power. The empire of the west will have been long extinct, when, strange to say, it reappears in the latter day. But there is a great deal more than simply the revival of imperialism, which draws out the astonishment of the world. They had thought it all over with the Roman empire. They could easily understand a new empire ; they could readily conceive a Teutonic kingdom, or a Muscovite dominion, or any other of large space and population ; but the revival of the Roman empire will take the world by surprise. This is a part of what is here referred to. The grounds of this assertion, however, depend on chap. xvii., so that I cannot now enter into minute evidence, nor do I wish to anticipate what will come before us in the next lecture. Let it suffice to give what I believe to be the truth revealed about it as we pass onward.

But then it is not simply that this empire had qualities of power that belonged to more than one of the previous empires, and that it had its own peculiarity in that it was marked by the revival of imperialism at the close. We are told that "they worshipped the dragon, because he gave authority to the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? and who is able to make war with him?" It is evident, therefore, that we have here an apostate and idolatrous state of the world. The dragon is worshipped, as is the beast; and 2 Thess. ii. is plain that worship is paid to another personage connected with, but distinct from, these both, called "the man of sin," which is much more a religious power. The first beast is a political body; the religious chief will not be in the west at all, but in Jerusalem, and a very special object of worship in the temple of God there at the close.

This is a difficulty to some, because it is distinctly said that this man of sin will not tolerate any other object of worship. But then you must remember that they are all the same firm. Therefore to worship the one is pretty much to worship the other; just as in regard to the true God, there is no worship of one person in the Godhead without the same homage to the others. It is in vain for any to pretend to worship the Father without worshipping the Son, and he that worships the Father and the Son can only worship in the power of the Holy Ghost. When we worship God as such,—when we say "God," we do not mean Father only, but Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. So precisely in this awful counterpart, the fruit of the energy of satanic craft and power at the close. The worshipping of the dragon

and of the beast seems therefore quite consistent with divine worship paid to the man of sin. The fact is, they are, as often remarked with justice, the great counter-trinity—the trinity of evil as opposed to the Trinity of the Godhead. The devil is clearly the source of it all; but then the public leader of his power politically is the beast; and the grand religious agent, who works out all plans and even miracles in its support, is the second beast or man of sin.

This appears to be the true and mutual bearing of all, if we bow to all these scriptures. I am aware that differences of thought exist here as in almost everything else. But this objection has no force at all. The only question is, what best satisfies the word of God,—what most faithfully answers not merely to the letter of it, but to its grand principles? I am persuaded, therefore, that far from any real obstacle in the fact of these three different objects being combined in worship, on the contrary the force and nature of the case cannot well be understood unless this is seen.

Let us pursue the other points which the scriptures set before us. “And there was given him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given him to continue [or act] forty-two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that tabernacle in heaven.” Here again it seems evident that there is a people in heaven removed from exposure to the power either of Satan or of the public instruments of his malice in the world. There are also saints here below. The tabernacle above may be blasphemed, and those that dwell there Satan may revile, but he cannot

touch—cannot even accuse longer before God. He turns therefore all his power to deal with man on the earth.

“And it was given him to make war with the saints” (clearly those that are not in heaven), “and to overcome them: and authority was given him over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him.” It will be seen that there is an invariable distinction between the crowd of the Gentiles scattered over the world, and “those that dwell on the earth.” The difference is that the former class is a larger term, embracing the world at large; whereas by the latter is meant a considerably narrower sphere, whose character of earthliness is the more decided, because it had known the heavenly testimony of Christ and the church. The name might be still held; but apostate hearts deliberately preferred earth to heaven, and would surely have their portion in neither, but in the lake of fire.

It is solemn to see that this is what Christendom hastens to become: infidelity and superstition are rapidly forming it now. All that is at work is bringing about this earthly and godless state of things. Never since the gospel was preached were men more thoroughly settling down in the endeavour to improve the earth, and consequently to forget heaven day by day, only thinking of it as a dismal necessity when they die, and cannot avoid leaving the world. But as to turning to heaven, both as a hope full of joy and as a home for the affections, whenever was it more thoroughly kept out of the minds of men? All this then prepares us for the designation given to the people that did hear of heaven



but deliberately gave up all the hopes connected with it to settle down on the earth. They were dwellers on the earth. The others are "every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation," that have heard comparatively little about the gospel. But he will endeavour to deal with both; and more particularly "all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose name is not written in the book of life of the slain Lamb from the foundation of the world."

Carefully bear in mind that "from the foundation of the world" belongs not to "slain," but to the writing of the name. John does not mean that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, but that the name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. Compare Rev. xvii. 8.

"If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity." The importance of this statement was to guard the saints themselves from taking power peremptorily into their own hands. They might cry to God, they might ask Him to arise and judge the earth, but they were not to fight themselves. As the beast would take power, so should he suffer the consequence. He might lead into captivity, but into captivity he must go. He might kill with the sword, but he must be killed himself: indeed, his would be a still more awful doom. At the same time patience, with this retributive sanction annexed, is put in as a general principle, and stated in such a form as to apply to any one. It was surely and particularly meant to guard the saints from mistake and wrong. I do not think the direct application is to the beast, but

rather warning to the saints of God. "Here is the patience and faith of the saints." This gives the application.

In the latter part of the chapter we have a second beast. This calls for more attention, because there has been and there is a danger of some confusion and difficulty on this subject. Let it be observed that the second beast it is which more particularly resembles in wickedness what the Lord Jesus was in goodness. It is indeed a "beast;" that is, it has a kind of imperial power, though very likely on a far smaller scale than the first beast. Still it has the character of empire attached to it. It is a beast, and not merely a horn. Then the horns that it has have a peculiar character. "He had two horns like a lamb." There was the pretence of resembling the Messiah. But "he spake as a dragon." It was really the expression of Satan. "And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence." It is, therefore, plain that the second beast is really the more energetic of the two, and the active instrument of evil.

And this is always the case in every form of wickedness that has ever been forged for this world. The promoters of it—the persons that exercise the influence, sometimes unseen, sometimes publicly—are as a rule those that put religion forward. The religion of the earth is the prolific source of all the worst evil that is done under the sun. The devil could not accomplish his plans if there was not such a thing as earthly religion. Is not this an awful thing to think of, and a solemn thing, too, for those that have the smallest connection with it?

Accordingly in this case, observe, the second beast which resembles Christ, and takes that place, does not come out of the sea, or the turbulent state of the nations, but out of the earth. It is a more settled state of things when this beast appears, who exercises all the authority of the first beast before him (that is, in his presence, with his full sanction: it is not usurpation; it is not in any sense something done without him; but it is done in his presence, as is here said); "and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast" (there is an understanding between them), "whose deadly wound was healed." It is remarkable that in 2 Thess. ii. we do not hear of his causing the world to worship the first beast; but that he compels or at any rate claims worship, and is himself worshipped as God. For he arrogates divine worship to himself.

It makes the whole matter plain, if we remember that the first beast means the Roman empire, and, consequently, its seat is the west. The second beast, on the contrary, is in the land of Palestine, and has a Jewish form. Any one who looks at 2 Thess ii. can see that we are in view of what will be in the land of Judæa, and not in Rome. It is the temple of God that is particularly seen, where the man of sin sets himself up as an object of worship. Only we must remember that we must read scripture with scripture. Supposing I treat the second chap. of 2 Thessalonians as giving me all that the Bible tells about the man of sin, I foreclose scripture, and must have an imperfect account. On the other hand, if we take only what we have in Revelation xiii., we shall want certain elements necessary for com-

pleting the sketch. I believe that all this is arranged with consummate wisdom by God, because He does not want us to read only one part of His word; He wishes us thoroughly to search into all His word. He will not give a proper understanding of holy writ, unless there be a real confidence in and value for all that He has given us. Consequently it is only by putting together these scriptures, as to which there is ample light to show what is referred to, that we can really understand the subject.

Now it is quite plain in the first part of the chapter that we have before us a mighty political power. It is equally certain that 2 Thessalonians ii. describes not a vast imperial system so much as a religious power. An utterly lawless personage is the man of sin, but still essentially a religious power. It claims to itself what belongs to God; and this is precisely what we find connected with the second beast.

We may remark another feature in the symbol here. It had two horns. The reason, as I suppose, is connected with the whole testimony of John. Any one who has looked into it will see that even as to our blessed Lord Himself, the general bent is to show what He was on earth—not what He is in heaven. I admit there are exceptional passages in John; but while Paul's object is to direct us to Christ in heaven, as the characteristic point of his witness, John on the contrary draws particular attention to what He was on earth.

This seems to me of importance for the meaning of these two horns. The Lord Jesus, as all are aware, was a prophet on earth; and assuredly, as we know, He will reign as king over the earth. But what lies between?

He is priest ; but He is priest in heaven. Accordingly it is not the place of John but of Paul to bring out the heavenly priesthood of Christ. John never, as far as I know, developes the offices of Christ above. Not but that he points out what connects itself with them, as for instance, in chapter xiii., and again in chapter xiv., as well as in chapters xvii. and xx. of the Gospel. But these are quite exceptions. The general strain of John is to dwell on Christ manifesting God here below. Paul's doctrine is man glorified in heaven.

Accordingly this I believe to be the key to the two horns of the beast. When the Antichrist appears, he will not take the place of being a priest ; far higher will be his assumption. He will set up to be a prophet and a king, yea, a king imitating what Christ will be to Israel. We have two horns, not seven ;—it is an imitation, but not of the full power of Christ. In the Lord we see perfection of power, just as could be said of the Holy Ghost in His fulness of power for government. In the Antichrist there is the pretension to what belonged to Christ connected with the earth, and with the most marked absence of what pertains to Him in heaven.

This is no mean evidence by the way, that the idea of applying all this to the papacy as its full meaning is a mistake ; for the essential feature of the papacy lies in its assumption to be a living earthly representative of Christ's priesthood. It is precisely the corruption of what is heavenly and not Messianic. Popery is much more *antichurch* than *antichrist*. Such is the difference.

But when Rev. xiii. is fulfilled, there is no question of the church any longer. The Christian body will be no more seen on earth ; the saints of the high places are



on high. Accordingly it is not a mere sham clothing with the priestly power of Christ which the antichrist makes, but a false assumption of His prophetic place which was on the earth, and of His kingly sphere which will be on the earth. This personage claims both powers. He has two horns like a lamb, and is active in the performance of great signs and wonders. He has a double activity. First of all, he borrows the controlling influence of the Roman empire,—he exercises all the authority of the first beast. Besides this, he does a vast deal on his own account which the Roman emperor could not do. “And he worketh great signs, that he should even make fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.” That is, he imitates the power not only of Christ but of God. He claims to be the Jehovah God of Israel. Just as Jesus is Jehovah as well as Messiah, so this vessel of Satan’s power in Jerusalem will emulate what God did by Elijah to disprove the claims of Baal. Fire, we know, came down and consumed the sacrifice of old, and God demonstrated as clearly that Baal was not God, as that Jehovah was. So the second beast will do wonders, not really, but in appearance. “He worketh great signs that he should even make fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of those signs which it was given him to work in the sight of the beast.”

All shows that this is the antichrist. The first beast does not work any miracles whatever. He astonishes the world by reviving imperialism ; but this is a very different thing, and cannot properly be called a sign. It may and will amaze men, but is not a miracle. But

the beast out of the earth or land, which is incomparably more active and energetic than the first, does work great signs (no doubt by Satan's energy, but still he works them); and the consequence is that he "deceiveth them that dwell on the earth," saying to them especially "to make an image to the beast, which had the stroke of the sword, and lived." I am not prepared to say whether this is or is not the abomination of desolation set up in the holy place. It seems to resemble that idol, and may probably be the same thing.

"And it was given him to give life to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark on their right hand, or on their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is a man's number; and his number [is] six hundred threescore [and] six."

The various guesses that have been made respecting this number are most inadequate. It may be that it is one of those secrets that cannot be unravelled until the person appears, when we may be sure that at least the wise will understand it. That we are to understand it now is, I think, more than we ought to assume. To what moral profit could it possibly serve? Assuredly everything that can edify and refresh the soul, and that can be used by the Holy Ghost for real blessing in separating us from the world and attaching us to

heaven, and, above all, to Christ, we may gather from the Revelation rightly understood now. Indeed, I believe we can gather a great deal more than those who are to be in the circumstances will be able to reap in their day. But there may be points of minute application kept back by the wise reserve of God, who does not indulge mere curiosity, as this would be. Such knowledge will be of practical importance only when the time comes; and therefore I do not doubt that this is just one of those points in which the Lord does not gratify men's minds now. I have heard no explanation that carries any force along with it. Many of those which have been offered entirely and obviously fail—for instance, "apostacy" and such like explanations. "Apostacy" is not the number of a man; nor for similar reasons can "apostate" stand, nor, perhaps, "the Latin man" or kingdom, though certainly entitled to attention. Further, it does not seem, as generally thought, to be the number of antichrist, the second beast, but of the Roman empire, or rather Emperor, in final antagonism to Jehovah and His anointed.

Next we come to chapter xiv., where we have neither the counsels of God as opposed by Satan, first in heaven and then in earth; nor the plan and instruments by which Satan gives battle to those counsels. All this we have had in chapters xii. and xiii. But now we enter on another line of things. What is God doing with His own? Nothing? Impossible! All must be active and good. God, therefore, is pleased to reveal to us a variety of ways in which He will put forth His power, and send both testimony and warning suited to the crisis; and

this is given with remarkable completeness throughout the seven divisions into which this chapter naturally divides itself.

The first is a certain numbered multitude separated to the Lamb on mount Zion. The Lord Jesus is about to insist on His rights in the midst of Israel; and Zion is the known centre of royal grace. *Royal*, I say, because it is Christ asserting His title as Son of David; but it is also *royal grace*, because it supposes the total ruin of Israel, and that the Lord in pure favour begins there to gather round Himself once more. This accordingly is the first form in which God displays His action for the last days. The devil may have his beasts and horns; God has His Lamb; and the Lamb now is not seen on the throne in heaven, or taking a book. He stands on mount Zion. It is a notable point of progress toward the kingdom that is clearly brought before us before the close.

“And I looked, and, lo, the Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred and forty-four thousand, having his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.” *They* are not spoken of as conscious of any such relationship, as it is not a question of their Father, not of His Father and their Father. Nothing of the kind is ever found in the Apocalypse but “his Father’s name on their foreheads.” “And I heard a voice from heaven, as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing [as it were] a new song in presence of the throne, and in presence of the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, which

were bought from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women; for they are virgins."

These saints had not corrupted themselves; and the name of the Lamb is coupled with them. With Babylonish wickedness here below they had nothing to do; they were pure, and are associated with the holy Sufferer. "These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were bought from among men, first-fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault" ["before the throne of God" is spurious]. Such is the first action of God. It is a complete remnant, not said to be from the twelve tribes of Israel, such as we saw in chapter vii.; but this is particularly of the Jews. They were gathered out from those guilty of rejecting the Lamb. And now God answers all that and other wickedness by this merciful and honourable separation to the Lamb, who is now about to be installed in His royal seat on mount Zion.

The next scene gives us an angel flying. "And I saw," it is said, "another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having [the] everlasting gospel to preach unto those that sit on the earth, and unto every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and people." Why is it called "everlasting"? We must remember that the gospel which is being preached now is a very special gospel, and in no way an everlasting gospel. Nobody ever heard the gospel that is preached now till Jesus died and rose and even went to heaven. That is to say, the gospel as it should be preached in and out of Christendom depends on the most stupendous facts ever accomplished here below, for which God waited more than four thousand



years even of man's dwelling on the earth before He would or could righteously send it forth. Consequently the gospel of the grace of God, as we know, is not properly (never in scripture) called the "everlasting gospel." I suspect that most use these terms without thinking what is really meant. When they call the gospel now the "everlasting gospel," they have probably some vague notion that it connects us with eternity. They think it a fine-sounding epithet, conveying I really do not know what; but at any rate it is to be supposed that there is some idea in the mind of those that so characterize "the gospel of God." It is certainly a mistake, if scripture is to decide.

"Everlasting gospel" means what it says. It means those glad tidings that always have been and always will be true: whatever else God has made known to man, this has always abode unchanging. What is it then? The glad tidings of God always were that He purposes to bless man by the promised seed Christ Jesus, to set him up over the rest of creation, to have dominion as His image and glory. At the very beginning the first chapter of Genesis proves that this is God's mind for man here below. The end of all things will proclaim the self-same thing. The millennium will be a grand demonstrative testimony to it. In the new heavens and the new earth man will be thoroughly and for ever blest.

The declaration of this I believe to be the everlasting gospel. In the latter day it will act as the setting aside of the lie of Satan, who puts and would fain keep man in a position of estrangement from God, who is morally forced to be the judge of man instead of being the blesser of all upon the earth, and consequently to cast him

into hell. All this, it is plain, is the fruit of Satan's wiles; but the everlasting gospel presents God as the blesser of man and creation, as it always was in His mind, and as He will certainly bring it to pass; not, of course, for every individual man, because those who despise His mercy in Christ, and those especially who having heard despise the gospel of His grace, must be lost for ever. I am speaking now of what always was before Him, and always kept before man in His word.

The way in which the subject is spoken of here confirms this. "Fear God," is the message, "and give glory to him" (there is thus the evident contradiction of idolatry); "for the hour of his judgment is come." Then will be the downfall of all those that oppose God, not only of all the vanities of the nations, but of all those that heed or sustain them against God. "Worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Clearly therefore it is the universal message of God to man, and connected with His creation glory. The solemn threat of His speedy judgments is a ground of pressing on the blinded consciences of man the claim of the honour solely due to Him.

There are no doubt many who think it an extraordinary circumstance that God should send out such a message as this in days rapidly approaching. Let me say why such a difficulty is felt. It is because men conjecture and judge out of their own position and their own relationships. But never can we understand anything aright as long as we reason and conclude thus. It is not the way to understand any part of the Bible, least of all perhaps prophecy. If it be a question of our conduct or duty, it is indispensable to stand on

our proper relationship; we must abide carefully in the place that God has given us, while bowing to the word of God that applies to us there. How can we act intelligently or rightly as Christians unless we, knowing what it means, believe we are Christians? We only glorify our God and Father just so far as we look up as children to Him as our Father, and as saints own Him as our God. This is surely true. But here no Christians are said to be on earth: we have elect Jews; we have nations, along with "those that sit upon the earth." That is, there are men, apparently apostates, under the latter designation, as well as the general mass of mere nations, tribes, tongues, and peoples. It seems then that God comes down, as it were, to meet them on the lowest possible ground of His own truth. And what is that? They are called to fear God and give glory to Him; and this is on the ground that He is Judge, just about to deal with His own world. He calls upon them to abandon all that idolatry into which they will have fallen, particularly in those days.

And I have not the slightest question myself that at this present moment there is the working of a leaven that will end in idolatry, especially (if there be in this a difference) for the higher orders of this country, who will drag in the lower also. In the humbler classes there is in another way that grossness of love for sensible objects and show that will prepare them for idolatry. But I repeat that there is the active instilling of a spirit, no doubt more subtle and refined in the educated classes, which, in my judgment, will infallibly school them into naturalistic idolatry before many years

are over. There is, on the one hand, the material tendency of modern science and literature; there is, on the other, the condescending patronage of times that are past. On these dangerous tracks all that is now energetically leavening the world tends to bring man back to heathenism again; *i. e.*, the apostacy.

However this may be judged by those who hear it, we must remember that there will be also another cause of a most solemn nature, which is plainly revealed: God is going to pour out a judicial delusion on Christendom. It is certain that He will not only inflict severe blows of judgment, but give men up to believe a lie—the great lie of the devil. Here is the great truth of all times:—that God, the God who has now revealed Himself in Christ and by redemption, alone is the due object of worship. So far then is this message, to my mind, from being a strange thing that it appears exactly suitable to man as then situated, and no less to God's wisdom and goodness.

Another consideration perhaps may help some as connected with this, and confirmatory of it, founded on Matthew xxv., where the nations are called up before the Son of man when He sits as King upon the throne. It will be remembered that He tells those whom He designates as the sheep that, inasmuch as they did what they had done to His brethren, it was really to Him; as, on the other hand, the insults fell on Him which were aimed at them. These acts of kindness, or the contrary, will be owned by the Lord here. It is no use for people to call it the general judgment, or the judgment of our works. It is not. The one principle before us in this scripture is His dealing with the living

Gentiles, or the nations according to their ways with His brethren ; and it will require real power of God to act aright then. The pressure against His messengers will be enormous. If any receive them well, it will be from faith. I grant that the measure of their faith is small. That to honour His brethren is virtually to honour Himself, they do not themselves know. When they stand in presence of the King, how astonished they are that He should regard what was done to the messengers of His gospel in the last days as if done to His own.

Certainly these Gentiles were wrought in by divine grace, yet very evidently they will not be what you would call "intelligent." But then how often must we beware of making too much of this ! What a constant snare it is to slip into an unconscious criticism ! Men are apt to give themselves an exaggerated importance on the score of their knowledge. God, I am sure, always attaches a far higher value to the heed paid to the Lord Himself, and this too in those that He sends out. It is always a crucial test. It will be so then most of all, because these messages will go forth to the nations on the earth when, growingly lifted up and self-satisfied, they are summoned by messengers, poor and contemptible in their eyes, who will solemnly proclaim the kingdom just coming—the King who is coming in person to judge the quick apart from and before the judgment of the dead. But some souls here and there will receive them, not only treating them kindly, but this because they receive the message. The power of the Spirit of God alone will give them this faith. None less than God Himself will incline their



heart. Accordingly the Lord will refer to this reception, or the kindness that accompanied it, as an evidence of their heeding Himself in the persons of His messengers.

This I consider to be similar, if not the same, as the everlasting gospel; indeed it is called by Matthew the "gospel of the kingdom." I am inclined to infer that the "gospel of the kingdom" and the "everlasting gospel" are substantially identical; and that it was thus described because it was always in the purpose of God to establish this kingdom over the world, and to bless man himself here below. This Matthew, in accordance with his design, calls rather the "gospel of the kingdom," because Christ is going to be King. John, it would seem, calls it the "everlasting gospel," because it is in contrast with special messages from time to time, as well as with all that had to do with man as he is here below. At this most corrupt time, then, the message will be sent forth, and certain souls will receive it by God's grace.

Thus the second scene in the chapter is the proclamation of the everlasting gospel unto those settled down on the earth, and to the nations, &c., as the first section was the separation of a remnant of Jews to the Lamb on mount Zion.

The third section, which may be passed over with comparatively few words, is a warning respecting the fall of Babylon. An angel comes forth, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, the great city, which made all the nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

The fourth is a warning about the beast. "And the

third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark on his forehead, or on his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mingled without mixture in the cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up unto ages of ages: and they have no rest day and night, who worship the beast and his image, and if any one receiveth the mark of his name." So far these divine dealings all go in pairs: as the work among the Jews, and then a final testimony to the Gentiles; then the warning about Babylon, and another about the beast. "Here is the endurance of the saints, that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

Then we come to the fifth, which is rather different. It is a declaration, that "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth." From this time nobody that belongs to the Lord is going to die, and those that die in the Lord (*i.e.* in fact all who have thus died) are just on the point of blessedness, not by personal exemption but by the first resurrection and the reign with the Lord, which will terminate all further persecution and death for His name. The wicked must pay the wages of sin, and be destroyed by the judgments of God; but there shall be no more dying in the Lord after this. As a class these are to be blessed (not to die) henceforth. "And I heard a voice out of heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed [are] the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they shall rest from their labours; for their works do follow with

them." There is an end of such sorrow and labour : the Lord is going to take the world and all things in hand.

Accordingly in the next scene "I saw, and, behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sitting like unto [the] Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Send thy sickle, and reap ; for the hour is come to reap ; for the harvest of the earth is dried. And he that sat on the cloud thrust his sickle on the earth ; and the earth was reaped." It is not here a question of gathering in. The Son of man is seen with the crown of gold, King of righteousness, not yet manifested as King of peace.

And then the close of all the scenes comes. "And another angel came out of the temple that is in heaven, having himself also a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, that had authority over the fire ; and called with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth ; for her grapes are fully ripened." This goes farther. For the harvest the call was out of the temple ; here it is out of the temple that is in heaven. It is not only wrath on earth but from heaven. And another angel comes out from the altar (*i.e.*, the place of human responsibility, where God manifests Himself to sinners in the sacrifice of Christ, judging sins but in grace). So much the more tremendous His vengeance on the earthly religionists who despise Christ and the cross in deed if not in word. This angel has authority over the fire, the sign of detective and consuming judgment. In short, we have here

the harvest and the vintage,—the two great forms of the judgment at the close ; the harvest being that judgment that discerns between the just and the unjust, and the vintage being the infliction of unmingled wrath on apostate religion, “the vine of the earth,” which is the object of God’s special abhorrence.

It is plain, therefore, that here we have seven distinct acts in which God will interfere in the way of forming a testimony, of warnings to the world and comfort to His people, and finally of judging the results as far as the quick are concerned.

But a very peculiar scene is described in chapters xv. xvi. On this one need not now bestow more than a few words. “I saw another sign in heaven.” It is clearly connected with what we have had in chap. xii. “And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having seven plagues, the last ; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.” You will observe that it is not yet the coming of Christ. This is of importance to show the structure of this portion of the book. We must carefully beware of supposing that the seven bowls are after the Son of man is come for the harvest and the vintage of the earth. We shall find, so far from this being the case, that the vision must go back,—I do not say to the beginning of chapter xiv., but before the end of it. The very last of the bowls, the seventh, is the fall of Babylon. Now that act of judgment would correspond to the third dealing of God in chapter xiv. The first was the separation of the Jews ; the second the everlasting gospel to the Gentiles ; and the third the fall of Babylon. Thus the last bowl only brings us

up to the same point. Hence the bowls must not in any way be supposed to follow after chapter xiv., but only after its earlier part at the utmost. This is important, because it may help some to gather a juster idea how to place chronologically the various portions of the book. The last bowl is also the last outpouring of God's wrath before the Lord Jesus Christ comes. Consequently it must precede the latter part of that chapter. It synchronizes, we have seen, with the third out of its seven consecutive sections. The end of chapter xvi. does not in point of time fall lower than the third step in those of chapter xiv. The fourth probably, but certainly the fifth, sixth, and seventh are events necessarily subsequent to all the bowls.

Let us look then a little into the subject. "I saw as it were a sea of glass." But here it is distinguished in its accompaniments from the description in chapter iv. There the elders were seen on thrones, with the sea of glass bearing its silent but strong testimony that these saints had done with earthly need and danger,—that those who required the washing of water by the word are not contemplated in this scene. This is all intelligible and even plain. When the glorified saints are caught up to heaven, they no longer require what was set forth by the laver and its water to purify; for the sea of glass attests that the purity was fixed. The fact is, that they were beyond the scene where water was needed to cleanse their daily defilements.

Here it is not merely a sea of glass, but mingled with fire. What does this teach? It declares, in my opinion, that these saints passed through a time of fearful fiery tribulation, as did not the elders. The absence of the



fire in connection with the elders is just as significant as the presence of fire in connection with the saints in collision with the beast and the false prophet, of whom we are now speaking. If people ask you, "Are the saints to pass through the time of tribulation? The right answer is, What saints do you mean? If you mean those that are presented by the elders caught up at Christ's coming, clearly they will not. Scripture is positive. If you only mean that some saints are to pass through that tremendous time, it is unquestionable. In short, we have only to distinguish, and all becomes perfectly plain: by confounding the two classes all is made a mass of obscurity. But scripture cannot be broken.

Here then we find a sea of glass mingled with fire. "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and those that have gained the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God." The victory over the beast is never predicated of the elders in any sort; nor is there any connection with the elders here. It is a closing scene of fearful trial. This is important. The victories here are confined to the time when Satan's last plans become consummated. These were delivered from them probably before the beast falls. At any rate, the time does not seem of prime importance, but the fact is undeniable that these conquerors belong exclusively to the time of the last efforts of the devil through the beast and the false prophet. They are strictly speaking therefore Apocalyptic saints, and the final company of them. It will be recollected that in our last lecture we saw the first sufferers.

Although these may have fallen under the hand of the Roman Empire, they really got the victory over it, and are here seen standing on the sea of glass having harps of God. Their melody in praise of the Lord was none the worse for the sea of tribulation through which they had passed into His presence.

“And they sing the song of Moses, servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” Thus it is plain that they are not Christians in the strict sense of the word. Assuredly they are saints in the most real sense, but not standing in the relations which now subsist; they are not to have that sort of bond which is made good by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in those who are now in association with Christ. So exclusive is it that those who may have been under Moses are under him no more; they own no master or head save Christ. Whereas the souls of whom we read here still retain their link with Jewish things, though beyond a doubt they serve God and the Lamb. Hence we hear of them “saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, O King”—not “of saints,” but “of nations.” There is no such thing in scripture as “King of saints.” This is one of the worst readings of the vicious received text of the Revelation. I do not hesitate to say, both that it is against the best witnesses, and that it conveys a heterodox meaning, and is consequently mischievous. For what can go more practically to destroy the proper relationship of the saints of the Lord? Elsewhere we never hear of such a thing as “King of saints,” nor has it any just sense. To the saints the Lord Jesus stands undoubtedly as their Lord and master; but *king* is a relationship with

a nation living on the earth. It is not at all a connection that pertains to the new man. Besides, these if martyred belong actually to heaven, where such a relationship would be strange indeed. Thus it is strange doctrine as well as a fictitious reading. The allusion is to Jeremiah x. 7. There you will find "king of nations," with other words which are cited here. If these saints were not exclusively Gentiles, at least they comprehended such; and this has to be borne in mind in reading the passage. The true title then is "king of Gentiles" or of "nations." No doubt King of the Jews He is; but those in particular who were Gentiles themselves would and ought to rejoice in being able to praise Him as the King of nations.

"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee" (here again it is not Israel, but *all nations* shall come); "for thy judgments are made manifest." They are anticipating the triumph that is reserved for God in the day of the glory of Christ's coming.

"And after that I saw, and there was opened the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven: and the seven angels came out of the temple, that had the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who liveth unto the ages of the ages. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no one was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled." It is

not now the ark of God's covenant seen in the opened temple. It is characterised as the tabernacle of the testimony, and judgments follow on apostate Gentiles, not the revelation of the divine counsels touching Israel.

Then (chap. xvi.) we have these seven bowls poured out. It is not now "the third" as under the trumpets, with which the analogy is close; there is no restriction to the western empire of Rome. The whole apostate sphere is smitten, and with yet more severity. The first, as we know, was on the earth; the second on the sea; the third on the rivers and fountains of waters; and the fourth on the sun. Thus all the different departments of nature, whatever may be symbolized by them (and their meaning seems to me neither indeterminate nor obscure), were visited by the bowls of God's wrath.

The three later bowls, like the three woe-trumpets, come to closer quarters with men.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast. It is clear therefore that we have here a Gentile sphere before us, which fits in with the prefatory scene. "The fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings that are from the sun-rising might be prepared." The Euphrates was the boundary that separated the empire on its oriental frontiers from the vast hordes of uncivilized north-eastern nations destined to come

into conflict with the powers of the west in the latter day. Thus the way is made plain for them to come forward and enter into the final struggle. This seems the meaning of the drying up of the great river. "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of demons, working signs, which go forth unto the kings of the whole habitable earth, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God the Almighty." This gives proof of what I have just now referred to. There is about to be a universal uprising and fight to the death between the east and the west. But the Lord has designs which neither side knows nor regards, and He is no indifferent spectator. "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And they" (for I take it so) "gathered them together unto the place called in the Hebrew tongue Armagedon."

Lastly comes the seventh angel, who deals with the world still more decidedly and universally by pouring on the air. "And the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake"—and not only great but unexampled—"such as was not since men were upon the earth, such an earthquake, so great." Clearly, therefore, judgment from heaven becomes yet more unsparing in its blows on man here below. "And the great city came (ἐγένετο) into three parts, and the cities



of the nations fell : and great Babylon was remembered before God." This accounts for the warning of the fall of Babylon referred to in the complete series of God's dealings in chap. xiv. To that chap. xvi. now brings us up in point of time.

This must suffice for to-night, though no more than a sketch of the general bearing of this part of the prophecy. •

## XII.

### THE REVELATION.

Chaps. xvii.—xxii.

It is necessary that we should all bear in mind, if we have not observed it before, that Rev. xvii. does not pursue the chronological course of the prophecy. It is a description, and not one of the visions that carry us onward. The seventh bowl contained under it the fall of Babylon, which “was remembered before God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.”

This chapter explains how it was that Babylon was so offensive to God, and wherefore He judged her thus sternly. But, in point of fact, in giving the description of Babylon, the Holy Ghost enters even more into an account of her relations with the beast, the imperial power of which we saw not a little last night. Accordingly these are the two main objects of judgment brought before us in the chapter. It is true, the beast’s judgment is only referred to as a defeat under the hand of the Lamb. The particulars are reserved for a later point in this prophecy. We must therefore look a little into the two objects—Babylon and the beast.

The principle is very clear. Man has always sinned

in one or other of these two ways, looking now at sin in its broadest forms. The woman—the strange woman—sets forth corruption, human nature indulging itself in its own evil desires, irrespective of God's will. The beast is the expression of the will of man setting itself up in direct antagonism to God. In short, one may be described as corruption, and the other as violence.

There is, however, a great deal more than this on the subject, and given with great precision in scripture, because this is merely the principle of sin in one or other form from the beginning. It will be observed that in this case it is one of the angels that had the seven bowls who comes forward and says to John, "Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore (or harlot) that sitteth upon [the] many waters." There were two particular effects of her evil: the one, illicit commerce with the kings of the earth; the other, intoxicating the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her fornication.

"So he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness"—a thorough waste as to the knowledge or enjoyment of God. The woman was there seen sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast, *i.e.*, the well-known imperial power of the Roman Empire,—“full of [the] names of blasphemy” in its wicked opposition to God, and clothed with the forms we have already seen—“seven heads and ten horns.” The Spirit of God regards it in its final shape and completeness, as far as it was permitted to attain it. “The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls.” Everything that could attract the natural man was there; and all that which to him looks fair

enough on the side of religion. But she has a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication.\* Idolatry is the awful stamp that she bears, and this too both in what she gives to man, and in what is written on her forehead before God. "Upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth."

Men have been beguiled here and there, and from an early date, to set aside the true bearing of this chapter. Sometimes they have contended for its application to pagan Rome. Sometimes, again, they have sought to turn it aside toward Jerusalem in her corrupt state. But a grave consideration soon disposes of both views by the relation to the beast, and more particularly by what will be shown a little farther on. The application to old pagan Rome is harsh and purposeless enough; but the attempt to refer it to Jerusalem is of all schemes the most absurd; for, far from being borne up by the imperial power, Jerusalem was trodden down by it. If there was any Gentile power since John's day, which did *not* sustain but persecute and suppress Jerusalem, it was Rome, instead of being a gaudy harlot mounted on that vast empire.

At the same time the attempt to apply Babylon to ancient Rome is almost as unhappy; and for a plain reason. As long as Rome was pagan, there was neither the full bearing of the seven heads, nor did so much as one of the ten horns exist. The decem-regal division of the broken empire in the West, as all know, was

\* Most copies, it would seem, read  $\tau\eta\varsigma \gamma\eta\varsigma$ , "of the earth;" the Alex. and others give  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\eta\varsigma$ , "of her." The Sinai MS. has both.

long after Rome had ceased to be heathen. Nobody can dispute that this remarkable cluster of kingdoms in Europe was the fruit providentially of the destroyed unity of the Roman empire when the barbarians invaded it. With that love of freedom which they carried from their German forests, they would not allow the one iron rule of the ancient empire to subsist longer, but set up each their own kingdom in the different fragments of the dismembered empire. Thus the attempt to apply it during the pagan period is altogether futile on the face of the matter. We shall find that the scripture affords much light to decide the true bearing of the prophecy, and that no application to the past can possibly satisfy the conditions satisfactorily. If ancient times failed fully to meet the requirements of the chapter, it is evident that the middle ages are passed without its fulfilment as a whole. When we come to the full application of the prophecy, we must look onward to the latter day.

This falls in with what we have seen of the book in general ; but I do not deny that certain elements which figure in the Apocalypse then existed and still exist. No one can soberly deny that Babylon in some sort had a place then ; but that the special, and above all, the full character of Babylon was manifested as here portrayed is another matter. We may surely say *her* cup was not yet full. There was not yet fairly out before men what God foresaw as that which must finally provoke His judgment. Again, to my mind it seems demonstrably true that the relation to the beast here brought before us must in all fairness be allowed to look onward to a later stage of Babylon. Thus there is no question



that some of the actors in the final scenes of the great drama were already there, as the reigning city, and the Roman empire. Moral elements too were not wanting : the mystery of lawlessness had long been at work, though the enemy had not yet brought in the apostacy, and still less the manifestation of the lawless one. But whatever subsisted then, that which the Spirit here presents as a whole cannot be found realized at any point of time in the past. We must perforce therefore look for a still more complete development before the Lamb judges the beast after the ten horns along with it shall have destroyed Babylon.

There is another remark to make. It is hard to see how Roman city, or anything civil connected with it, could be called "mystery." It is partly because of this that many excellent men have endeavoured to apply the vision to Romanism ; and I admit that there is found a measure of analogy. That religious system has an incomparably nearer connexion with this mysterious harlot than anything we have yet spoken of. There is no doubt that Rome in some form is the woman described in the chapter : the seven heads or hills clearly point to that city, which of all cities might best and indeed alone be known as ruling over the kings of the earth. There is therefore much to be said for the Protestant application of the chapter as compared with the Præterist theory of pagan Rome. Yet it will be found imperfect, for reasons which, I think, will be clear to any unbiassed mind.

There stands the solemn brand graven, not on the blasphemous beast, but on the forehead of its rider, "Mystery, Babylon the great." The question is, *why* is

she thus designated? If only an imperial city, what has this to do with mystery? The simple fact of conquering far and wide, and of exercising vast political power in the earth, does not constitute any title to such a name. A mystery clearly points to something undiscoverable by the natural mind of man—a secret that requires the distinct and fresh light of God to unravel, but which when revealed thus is plain enough. And so it is with this very Babylon that comes before us here. Justly does she gather her title from the old fountain of idols and of combined power without God: confusion being here the characteristic element, the designation is taken from the renowned city of the Chaldeans, the first spot notorious in both respects.

But the attempt, again, to apply what is said here to a future city of Babylon in Chaldea seems to me no less vain. There is a distinct contrast between the city John describes and the ancient Babylon, in that the latter was built on the plain of Shinar, while the former is expressly said to have seven heads, and these explained to mean seven mountains. I admit that there may be something more in the symbol than the literal hills of Rome, because they are said to be also seven kings. At the same time we are not at liberty to eliminate such a feature out of the description. It is written to be believed, not to be ignored or explained away.

In short, it would seem that God has hedged round His own draft of Babylon so as to make it quite plain that Rome, city and system, figures in the scene; and this too necessarily involving a mediæval description, though the full result will not be till the end of the age; for she rides the beast or empire characterized so as

naturally to involve the past barbarian irruption and the resulting ten-kingdomed state. Again, that it supposes Rome after it had professed the name of Christ I think is not to be doubted, if only from the expression "mystery" attached to Babylon. It clearly contrasts this mystery with another. We have not to learn what the other mystery means; we know well that it is according to God and godliness. But here is a mystery altogether different:—"Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth."

Here were joined good and evil in godless union, for the worse, not for the better,—this alliance, unholy in principle, irremediable therefore in practice, between God and the natural man, who substitutes rites for the grace and word of God, for the blood of Christ, and the power of the Spirit, and employs the name of the Lord as a cover for grosser covetousness and ambition, yet more aspiring than the vulgar world. All these things have their place in Babylon the great. She is the mother of the harlots, but also (and with still deeper guilt) of the abominations of the earth. This brings in idolatry, real shameless idolatry too, not merely that subtle working of the idolatrous spirit that every Christian has to guard against. Here it is the positive worship of the creature besides the Creator, yea, and notoriously more than He. For who knows not the horrors of Mariolatry? Babylon is the parent of the "abominations of the earth." It is not therefore a question of virtual idols suitable to ensnare the children of God, but of that which is adapted to the earth itself,—thorough-going palpable idolatry.

Such is God's account of Babylon the great. Take notice of this (which confirms the application just now contended for), that when John saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, he wondered with great wonder. Had it been simply a persecution from pagans, what was there to wonder at in their deadly hatred of the truth and of those who confess it? That an openly heathen metropolis, devoted to the worship of Mars, and Jupiter, and Venus, and other wicked monstrosities of pagan mythology should be irritated with the gospel which exposes it all, and should consequently seek to injure the faithful, was to be expected, and a necessary result, directly that the uncompromising spirit of Christ was known. Had those who preached said nothing about heathen vanities, had they merely presented the gospel as a better thing than anything the pagans could boast, I do not doubt that the pagans themselves would have acknowledged thus much. And it is pretty well ascertained that there was a discussion among them, even to the suggestion by one of the most wicked of their emperors, whether Christ should not be owned and worshipped in the Pantheon, hundreds of years before Constantine, indeed from the earliest epoch of the gospel. But there never was the thought of giving Christ the only place He could take. For Christ has not only a supreme but an exclusive place. Now there was nothing more repulsive and fatal to paganism in every form than the truth revealed in Christ, which exposed every thing that was not itself—not the truth, definite and exclusive. Consequently Christianity, as being directly aggressive on the falsehood of heathenism, was of all things the most

offensive to Rome. That pagan Rome, therefore, should set itself against Christianity was to be expected, and so the fact proved.

But it was no such evil which astounded the prophet. He was filled with astonishment that this mysterious form of evil, this counter-testimony of the enemy (not antichrist, but antichurch), should seem and be largely accepted as the holy catholic church of God, that Christendom, if not Christianity, should at the same time become the bitterest of persecutors, more murderously incensed against the witnesses of Jesus and the saints of God than ever paganism had been in any country or all ages. This very naturally filled him with intense wonder.

“And the angel said unto him, Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman.” Had he really penetrated under the surface, and seen that beneath the fair guise of Christendom the woman was, of all things under the sun, the most corrupt and hateful to God, it would not be so much to be surprised at. Therefore says the angel, “I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, that hath\* the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation

\* The description here is simply character, not dates. If a person drew from this, for instance, that the beast was to carry the woman, Babylon, *when* it had as a fact all that is meant by the seven heads and the ten horns, it would be an error. The angel implies nothing of the sort. It is a question here of distinctive character, apart from that of time, for which we must search other scriptures.



of the world, beholding the beast that he was, and is not, and shall be present." The closing phrase here is the description of the beast in its last state, in which it will come into collision with Babylon. Let us bear this in mind. It will help to show us that, whatever may have been the past conditions of Babylon, there is a future one; and it is in that future one that Babylon is to perish. For remark, the beast or Roman empire is described here as that which once existed, which then ceased to exist, and which assumes a final shape when it reappears from the bottomless pit. Bad as pagan Rome was, it would be false to affirm that it ever had come out of the bottomless pit. When the apostle Paul wrote to the saints at Rome, he particularly specified at that very time the duty of absolute subjection on the part of Christians to the powers which then were. Of course the application to the Roman empire would be immediately in the mind of any Christian at Rome. There was no doubt at all of the character of the emperor; there never had been a worse than he; yet God took that very opportunity to lay this on the Christians as their duty to the worldly authority outside and over them. It was ruled in general that the worldly powers were ordained of God. But this is not to emerge from the bottomless pit.

But there is a time coming when power will cease to be ordained of God; and this is the point to which the last condition of the beast refers. God in His providence did sanction the great empires of old; and the principle continues as long as the church is here below. Hence we have to own the divine source of government even when its holders abandon all such

thoughts themselves, and maintain their rule in the world as a thing flowing from the people irrespective of God. But the day is coming when Satan will be allowed to have things his own way. For a short time (what a mercy that it must be only for a short time!) Satan will bring forth an empire suited to his purposes, as it springs from Satanic principles which deny God; and this is part of what appears to be meant by the beast ascending out of the bottomless pit. It "shall go into perdition," it is therefore added, "and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and shall be present." "Yet is" is a most unfortunate expression. It is the fault, however, of the bad Greek text of Erasmus, Stephens, &c. It should be, "and shall be present."\* There is no thought of making such a paradox to perplex the mind. The true reading here is neither hard nor doubtful save to unbelief. There is no paradox in the message whatever. It is all plain and simple—"the beast that was, and is not, and shall be present."

But all this will be a great reversal of man's history and political maxims. There never has been a like experience. What empire has existed, then sunk, and finally reappeared, with higher pretensions and power, only to perish horribly? It is altogether foreign to

\* Even the Complutensian editors give the right text here; and it would seem that Erasmus failed to use his MS. aright. For according to unquestionable testimony the Reuchlinian copy has *καὶ πάρεστι* like some half-dozen cursives, which was probably a mistake for *πάρεσται*.

history. One of the most approved axioms is, that kingdoms are just like men in this respect, that they begin, rise, and fall. As man does not believe in the resurrection of man, it is no wonder that he does not believe in the resurrection of an empire. The chief difference is that in man's case it is God who raises him, whereas in the empire's not God but the devil will raise it again. Beyond controversy, however, it is a most unusual and abnormal reappearance, which is altogether exceptional in the history of the world. Accordingly the resuscitated Roman empire will carry men away by a storm of wonder at its revival. Little do they know, because they believe not what is here written, that it is about to come out of the abyss or bottomless pit. That is, Satan will be the spring of its final rise and power; he, and not God in any way whatever, will give it its character.

“And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there (or they) are seven kings.” I have already touched on the double force of the symbol—mountains. “Five are fallen, one is, the other hath not yet come.” That is, the sixth head (reigning then in John's day) was the imperial form of government. Nothing of the sort can be plainer. We have here a note of time of signal value. A seventh should follow; and what is more, the seventh was in one aspect to be an eighth. “And the beast that was, and is not, even he is an eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth unto destruction.” In one sense it would be an eighth, and in another sense it would be of the seven; the eighth perhaps because of its extraordinary resurrection

character, yet one of the seven because it is outwardly old imperialism again. This explains, it seems to me, the wounded head that was afterwards healed. It is of the seven in that point of view, because it is imperialism; but it is an eighth, because it has a diabolical source when raised up again. In this way there never has been anything of the kind before.

“And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have not yet received a kingdom; but they receive authority as kings (not at but for) one hour with the beast.” They are all to reign concurrently with the beast. This also is a no less important element for understanding the chapter. All who have looked back on the history know, that when the ten kings appeared, there was no beast or imperial power. It was the destruction of the imperial unity of Rome that gave occasion for the well-known ten kingdoms which the barbarians set up afterwards. I am not raising any question about the ten. We know that sometimes there were nine, sometimes eleven or more; but supposing this all perfectly certain, I affirm that, according to history, they did not receive their power as kings for one and the same time with the beast. This is the meaning of “one hour with the beast.”

The very reverse is the undeniable fact. They received their power as kings when the beast ceased to exist. Thus the difference is complete between past history (if we look at the extinction of the empire and the rise of the ten kingdoms) and the certain fulfilment of the prophecy in the future, when we look at what God has really told us. I do not acknowledge the language to be either difficult or ambiguous. Man alone is to blame

who has misapplied it. Yet one allows freely a partial application already. We can quite understand that God would comfort His people in the dark ages by this book; and a very imperfect glimpse at its real meaning might in His grace serve to cheer them on in their trials as far as it went. From Rome saints had suffered; and it was easy to see that the revealed persecutress is called Babylon, and identified with the governing city of Rome. So far they were right. Nor is there any real reason to wonder at their deriving help from partial light. It was but an imperfect view they got even of justification; a far scantier perception, if they could be said to have had any, about Christ's Headship of the church, His priesthood, or almost anything else. And thus it was but a little glimpse they had of prophecy. But we can understand that the Lord could and did make that little go far, and do no little good.

But is there any reason why we should content ourselves with the measure enjoyed of old? Such is the hard bondage which mere historical tradition imposes on its votaries. Holding on to what others knew before them, or little more, they reduce themselves to a minimum of the truth. When God is so gracious, His word rich, full, and deep, it does seem sad to see His children content with just enough to save their souls, or keep them from positive starvation. In presence of grace I do not think this is for His glory, any more than for their own blessing. The only right principle in everything is to go to the source of divine truth, and to seek there refreshment and strength and fitness for whatever our God calls us to. And unquestionably God has been awakening the attention of His



people in a remarkable manner to the value of His word, and not least of all to the portion we are now examining.

It is plain that what the verse contemplates is neither the Roman power when there was one head of the empire, nor the eastern or Byzantine part of it after that partition, nor the western state of division under the kings who succeeded the deposition of Augustulus; for in the mediæval state there may have been ten kings (in contrast with the ancient state of the beast without them), but no beast or imperial system with its chiefs. This is what drove men to the idea of making the pope to be the beast. But that idea is wholly insufficient to cover or meet the word of God, which gives clear and strong reasons that prove the mistake of applying this to the pope as its complete fulfilment. For that which comes distinctly before us in this one verse is the twofold fact, that the ten horns here contemplated receive their kingly power for the same hour or time as the beast, and not subsequently, when his rule was extinguished. He gets his power and they get theirs for one and the same time.

This disposes of many a web of comments; for we find at once what is perfectly simple, what any child of God who believes this to be the word of God must own. Bringing in history here embroiled the subject; and those who appeal most to its evidence are the very men who seem in this to ignore its facts. But the most ordinary knowledge suffices; for who does not know from the Bible that there was a Roman empire when Christ was born, one emperor, and no such state as that empire divided into ten kingdoms? We find a decree

going forth that all the world shall be enrolled. Of course there must needs be a consultation with the kings, when the kings exist and become an accredited part of that empire, as rulers subordinate to the beast. But no ; it was an absolute decree that went forth, and this indisputably, from a single head of the undivided empire. Centuries after came in, not only the division into east and west, but the broken up state of the west, when there ceased to be an imperial chief. But the prophecy shows us the beast revived and the separate kings reigning for the same time, before divine judgment destroys them at the coming of Christ and His saints. Hence this certainly must be future.

How this precisely fits in, let me say, with the state of feeling in these modern times ; for “constitutionalism,” as men call it, is the fruit of the Teutonic system supervening on that of the broken up Roman empire. It was the barbarians who brought in the prevalent ideas of liberty as well as feudalism, and accordingly it is they that have firmly stood for freedom ; so that all the efforts to reconstitute the empire which have been tried over and over again have hitherto issued in total failure. The reason is manifest : there is a hinderer—“one that letteth.” It cannot be done till the moment comes. When its own season arrives, as it surely will, the divine hindrance is to be removed, and the devil then is allowed to do his worst. The political side of this is described here with surprising brightness and brevity. The ten horns with the beast are all to receive authority—the beast of course wielding the imperial power, they as kings, all during one and the same time before the end comes. Clearly, therefore, it is future.

It is impossible to refer it to the past with any show even of reasonable probability, I will not say of reality or truth. Scripture and facts refute all such theories.

"They have one mind, and give their own power and authority to the beast." Hitherto the reverse of this has been true in history. The horns have constantly opposed each other, and even sometimes the pope. Since then the world has not seen the imperial power to which all bow. Have we not all heard of the balance of power? This is what nations have been constantly occupied with, *lest* any one power should become the beast. If some few have joined on one side, some are sure to help the other, because they are jealous of any one acquiring such a preponderant authority and power as to govern the rest. But in the time really contemplated here all this political shuffling will be over. "These have one mind, and give their own power and authority to the beast," or their imperial leader. "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them (for he is Lord of lords and King of kings), and they that are with him, called, and chosen, and faithful."

But still we have not the end of Babylon yet. Her part in the corruption of the high and the intoxication of the low—her idolatrous character—has come before us. We have seen her connection with the beast; but there is a conflict coming. The woman was allowed to ride the beast—to influence and govern the empire first, but at last to be the object of hatred to the ten horns and the beast, who expose, rob, and destroy her. "And he saith to me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes,

and nations, and tongues." Such was her influence stretching out far beyond the beast.

The Gothic hordes were not yet incorporated with the empire, still less were they horns of the beast, nor did they give their power to it, but destroyed it rather. They broke up the beast yet more than Babylon. Past history therefore in no way suits the prophecy. "And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast." Here I am obliged to say that our authorized version, and not merely it, but our common Greek Testaments, are altogether wrong. This is known so well, and on such decided grounds, that it would be unbecoming to withhold the fact. There is no uncertainty whatever in the case. It is certain that we ought to read (not "upon" but) "*and*\* the beast." This is of great importance. The horns and the beast join in hating the whore. Not only are they supposed to be co-existent, but united in their change of feeling against Babylon. The friendships of the evil are not lasting. "These shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." It is not the gospel, nor the Holy Spirit, but the lawless revived Latin empire with its vassal kingdoms of the west, that combine and destroy Babylon. Unhallowed love will end in hatred. They will then treat her with contempt and shameful exposure. Next they will seize her resources. Finally they will destroy

\* It now appears that the Cod. Reuchlin. Capnionis, which was used by Erasmus, and lately discovered after a long obscurity by Dr. Delitzsch, reads *καὶ* (not *ἐπὶ*) *τὸ θ.* as the Complut. Polyglot, and all editions of the least critical value. Scholz's note ("rec. cum codd. pl.") is a myth. I am not aware of any MS. in its favour, though some versions represent it.

her. Can anything be less reasonable (even taking that ground, low as it is) than that the various rulers of the western powers, Catholic kings, join the Pope in destroying his own city, or his own church, whichever Babylon may be made? Some evade the difficulty by referring the desolation to the Gothic powers; and these Protestants, as if they were mere *Præterists*! What confusion! Is not this reason enough for saying that not even the shadow of solid ground appears for the system?

Hence the effort of some to prop up a manifestly false reading. It is due to the exigency of a notion which fears and is irreconcilable with the truth in this place. "The ten horns which thou sawest AND the beast" would give unquestionably the right form of the verse.

Thus everything implies their simultaneous presence for the same time and common action with the beast, in plundering and then destroying Babylon. God uses them for this object,—the setting aside of her, the great religious corruptress, whose centre is found at Rome. We can easily understand that the overthrow of the ecclesiastical power is necessary to leave a full field unimpeded for the imperial power to develop itself in its final form of violence and rebellion and apostacy against the Lord. Yet religion, be it ever so corrupt, acts as a restraint on human will, as a government does, however evil. Even the worst of governments is better than none. That a corrupt religion is better than none I will not say: at any rate it troubles men; it is a thorn in the side of those who want no religion at all. Hence the horns and the beast join together and desolate the harlot. That kings had dallied with her, that the beast



had once borne her up, will only turn to gall the more bitter to her, who, faithless to God, had staked the usurped and abused name of Christ to win what was now lost for ever. "For God put [it] into their hearts to do his mind, and to do one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." It is a time of strong delusion, be it remembered.

"And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, that hath kingship over the kings of the earth." None but Rome corresponds. "The woman" is the more general symbol designating her as the great imperial city; "the harlot" is her corrupt religious character, embracing papal Rome, but not ending with Popery as it is.

Chapter xviii. need not delay us long. It is a description, not of Babylon's relation to the beast, but of the city's fall, with certain dirges put into the mouth of the different classes that groan because of her extinction here below. But along with that God warns of her ruin, and calls on His people (verse 4) to come out of her. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." Then the word is, "Award her even as she awarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she mixed, mix to her double. In as many things as she glorified herself, and lived luxuriously, so much torment and sorrow give to her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am not a widow, and I shall in no wise see sorrow."

That is, Babylon is viewed in this chapter not so much in her mysterious and religious form, giving currency to every kind of confusion of truth and error, of good and evil, intoxicating, corrupting, and seducing, as all can see, through her wickedly religious influence ; but she is viewed here as the most conspicuous aider and abettor of the world in its luxuries and delights and the pride of life,—of what men call “civilization.” This is accordingly traced in our chapter with considerable detail, and with the sorrow and vexation of all the different classes who on the fall of Babylon groaned over her destruction, and the loss of their wealth and enjoyment.

But the graphic account does not end until the Spirit of God shows us another view of Babylon altogether. A mighty angel takes a stone and says, when he cast it into the sea, “Thus with violence shall be thrown down Babylon the great city, and shall be found no more at all.” The reason is given at the close ; not only “by thy sorcery were all the nations deceived,” but above all “in her was found [the] blood of prophets and saints, and of all the slain upon the earth.”

What a solemn and weighty fact in the government of God ! How can it be said that this vile, corrupt, idolatrous system of the last days was guilty of the blood of all martyrs ? She followed and had inherited the spirit of all, from the days of Cain, who had lifted up their hands against their righteous brethren. Instead of taking warning from the wickedness of those before her, who had seduced on the one hand, and persecuted on the other, she had, when she could, gone on increasing in both, until at last the blow of divine judgment came.

It is thus that God is wont to deal as a rule in His judgments,—not necessarily on the one that first introduces an evil, but on those that inherit the guilt, and perhaps aggravate it, instead of taking warning by it. And when God does judge, it is not merely for the evil of those then judged, but of all from the first budding of it till that day. This is not unrighteous, but, on the contrary, the highest justice from a divine point of view.

We may illustrate it by the members of a family. Supposing, for instance, a drunken father: if the sons had one spark of right feeling, not only must they feel the utmost shame and pain on account of their parent, but they would endeavour (like the sons of Noah who had a due sense of what was proper to their father) to cast some mantle of love over that which they could not deny, yet would not look at, but surely above all things they would watch against that shameful sin. But alas! there is a son in the family, who, instead of being admonished by his father's wickedness, takes license from it to indulge the same. On him the blow comes, not on the wretched parent. The son is doubly guilty, because he saw his father's nakedness and felt it enough to hide. But he ought to have withstood it—I do not mean in vengeance (for that belongs to the Lord), but as holily hating the sin itself, yet withal in the deepest compassion for his parent. But far from that he has, on the contrary, persevered in the same evil course, as badly or worse than his father. Then and thus is aggravated guilt in the case of this wicked son.

It is a precisely similar case here. Babylon had once

heard the varied testimony of God; for what had she not heard of truth? The gospel had been preached there, as she of Chaldea was not without law and prophet. Babylon must hear, I do not doubt, the final testimony of God—the gospel of the kingdom that is to go forth in the last days; but she loves her pleasure and power, and refuses truth. She will despise everything really divine; she will only use whatever of God's word she can pervert for increasing her own importance, and gaining a greater ascendancy over the consciences of men, and enjoying herself more luxuriously in this world; for she will go far to obliterate all remembrance of heaven, and to make this world a kind of paradise which she embellishes, not with pure and undefiled religion, but with the arts of men and the idolatries of the world.

This it is precisely which will bring out the indignant judgment of God upon the last phase of Babylon, so that the guilt of all the blood shed on the earth shall be imputed to her, and she may be judged accordingly. It does not hinder, of course, that in the judgment of the dead each man is judged for his own sin. This remains true. The day of the Lord on the world in no way sets aside His dealing with individual souls. The judgment of the *dead* is strictly individual, judgments in this world are not. His blows on this world come more nationally as on Israel; incomparably more severe, as in possession of greater privileges, is the judgment of corrupt Christendom, or Babylon as it is called here. But according to His principle of government it is not merely personal guilt, but that which, from despising the testimony of God, is thus morally accumulating from age to age in the ratio of the testimony of God

and the wickedness that has been indulged by men in spite of it. This may suffice for chapter xviii.

“After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great crowd in heaven, saying, Alleluia, the salvation, and the glory, and the power of our God: for true and righteous [are] his judgments: because he judged the great harlot, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And they said Alleluia a second time; and her smoke goeth up unto the ages of the ages.” The Spirit of God contrasts with the fall of Babylon the marriage of the bride, the Lamb’s wife. Babylon was the spurious church as long as it was a question of the church, and the final corrupter when it could be no question of this longer, and there went forth the closing testimony of God. I do not doubt that there was a corrupt form in connection with Israel in times past. That is, there was first the literal Babylon, of course; but here it is symbolical. A mysterious lawlessness inherits the well-known name of Babylon when Rome is brought forward; and it does not merely embrace Christian times, but the end of the age after the church has gone, when the course of divine judgment comes. Bear this in mind: to leave the last part out is fatal to any accurate understanding of the Revelation.

We find, accordingly, the four and twenty elders and four living creatures here brought before us for the last time. That is to say, the heavenly saints are viewed still as the heads of the glorified priesthood, and also the executive in the administration of God’s judgments. But a voice issues from the throne, saying, “Praise



our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were a voice of a great multitude, and as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God the Almighty reigneth.\* Let us be glad and exult, and give the glory to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." Now we find the symbol of the bride brought before us, and the elders and the living creatures disappear. The bride is in view.

Are we then to understand that the elders and the living creatures are together taken absolutely as the bride now? that those who were meant under the figures of the elders and of the living creatures assume the name and figure of the bride? In my opinion it is not absolutely so. The elders do show us the heavenly heads of priesthood (embracing, as I believe, the Old Testament saints and those of the New); *i.e.*, they are not limited to the church, Christ's body. Then, when the Lamb and His purchase by blood are celebrated in heaven, the four living creatures join the elders, though each is distinct. The glorified saints are to administer power in a way far beyond angels. The living creatures are from chapter v. coupled with the elders, as we find them in the beginning of chapter xix.

But now, when those symbols disappear, because of a new action of God (namely, the consummation of the church's joy), the elders and the living creatures

\* It is the aorist in Greek, which in such a case as this it is difficult correctly to represent in English; for neither "reigned" nor "hath reigned" could convey that God had entered on His kingdom, but rather that it was past.

disappear, and we have not the bride alone, but another class of saints, who at once come forward. "And to the bride was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of saints." I say "*righteousnesses*," not "*righteousness*." It is not what Christ puts on them, but a recognition even at this time of whatever has been of God—the working I do not deny of the Spirit of Christ. But it is what each saint has, though the blessed thought here is that the church has it not merely in the way of each person possessing his own; the bride has the whole of it (that is, the church in glory). The individual has his own fruit too. This remains true also in its own place, as we shall find; and when it is a question of reward, this is precisely the grand point; but when it is a question of the bride above, that is the way in which it is presented here, as we may see clearly from verse 8. The Spirit of God implies that it is decidedly not the righteousness here which is by another, and we thereby imputed righteous, but righteousnesses personal and actual. Of course the other is true. Before God we have that which is found only by and in Christ, which is another and a higher character altogether as compared with the righteousnesses of the saints.

Besides the bride thus arrayed, "He saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb." Here you may see the reason for saying that the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures are not absolutely the church, because when that symbol applies, and the one of the bride comes forward, we have got others too. What I

judge, then, is that the guests, or those that were called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, refer clearly to the Old Testament saints. If so, they are there in the quality not of the bride, but of those invited to the marriage of the Lamb; but I do not think them the Apocalyptic saints for the simple reason that, as shewn in the next chapter, the Apocalyptic saints are not raised from the dead yet. These remain as yet in the condition of separate spirits. That is not at all the way in which the guests are spoken of. I think, therefore, that the elders and the living creatures comprehend both the Old Testament saints and the church, the bride of Christ,—that consequently, when the bride is mentioned, there were these others who had been included in the elders and the living creatures, but who are now seen as a separate body. No doubt all this may seem to some a little difficult, but it is no use evading what is hard. We must face difficulties; we must bow to the word; we must seek to learn through all. We do not mend matters by hasty conclusions, we only complicate the truth. And it appears to me that here we are bound to account for the presence of these others that are at the marriage-supper of the Lamb, but appear as guests, and not at all in the quality of the bride. In general this has been either passed over in the chapter, or some unsatisfactory inference has been flung out, which can only embroil the prophecy. I do not, of course, complain of particular persons, but of the general vagueness in which the passage has been taken—unless, indeed, the more common course be not to ignore it.

Then the prophet falls down to pay homage to the angel; and this gives rise to a weighty admonition. It

is not only that the angel corrects the act by asserting that he is a fellow-servant of him and of his brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. On that account it was altogether out of place to pay homage to him instead of to the God who had sent him to serve. But he tells us further that the Spirit of prophecy, who prophesies in this book, is the testimony of Jesus. Thus the divine testimony is not confined to the gospel or the church, but the prophetic Spirit which characterizes the Revelation as a whole, after the church is translated, is equally a testimony of Jesus. This is most important, because it might be (as it has been) forgotten by some who make the gospel and the corresponding presence of the Spirit to be the same at all times; as others have thought, because chapter iv. and sequel treat of Jew and Gentile, and the state of the world under God's judgments, that this cannot be a testimony of Jesus at all. But it really is. "The Spirit of prophecy"—and such it is all through the Revelation after the seven churches are done with—"is the testimony of Jesus." We know the Holy Spirit rather as a spirit of communion with Christ. By and by, after our translation to heaven, He will work, and as vitally in those who bow to God, when it will be the reception of the prophetic testimony which is here owned to be none the less the testimony of Jesus.

Then heaven is opened, and for a sight most solemn. It is not now the temple opened there, and the ark of the covenant seen when Israel's security is seen, as the object of God's counsels; nor is it a door opened above, as we saw it when the prophet was giving his introduction to the prophecy of God's dealings with the world

as a whole, though in both cases all manifestly clusters round the Lord Jesus. But now heaven is opened for yet graver facts, and of incalculable moment for man and the universe and the enemy. It is Christ Himself about to be displayed in His rights as King of kings, and Lord of lords; and this in the face of the world. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse." Victorious power put forth to subdue is the meaning of the white horse. "And he that sat upon him called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." It is no longer a question of sustaining His saints in grace, but of sovereign power for judging the earth. "His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many diadems." There was judicial discernment with the distinct possession of all titles to sovereignty.

"And he had a name written, that no man knew but he himself." He is coming forth in indisputable human glory, but the greatest care is taken to let us know that He had that which was above man—above the creature; for "no man knoweth the Son but the Father." Here it would seem we have just what answers to that: this name none knew but He Himself. He was a divine person, whatever new position He assumes for the world. "And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood." He comes to execute vengeance, and with a sign of death for rebels. "And his name is called The Word of God." He was the word of God in the revelation of grace; when known, by and by, it will be as the executor of God's judgments. He equally expresses what God is. The gospel of John and the Revelation perfectly disclose both, whether in grace



or in judgment. "And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white, pure."

Here we learn at once of what His train consists. They are glorified saints, and not angels. And this is entirely confirmed by chapter xvii., where it was told us that they are with Him when He comes. When the beast dares to fight with the Lamb, He shall overcome the beast; and they that are with Him, "called and chosen and faithful"—terms, as a whole, entirely inapplicable to the angels. The angels are never "called," although they may be "chosen;" and though termed holy, I do not recollect that they are ever spoken of as "faithful." "Faithful" is what belongs to a man. It supposes the effect and the exercise of faith. "Called" is most evidently inapplicable, because calling supposes that the person is brought out of one condition and raised into another and a better one. This is never the case with an angel. The fallen angels are not called, and the holy angels never need to be—they are kept. Calling is the fruit of active grace on God's part towards man, and only towards him when fallen. Even man himself when he was innocent in Eden was not called. Directly he had sinned, the word of God came, and he was called. It is very evident, therefore, that the saints in a glorified state are here represented as following the Lord out of heaven. They are not seen here as the bride. This would have been altogether inappropriate for such a progress: when the King comes forth riding to victory in the judgment of wicked men—of the world, it is not in the quality of bride, but of armies or hosts, that the saints follow Him; and these include no doubt the

guests as well, *i.e.*, all the glorified take their place in His train.

At the same time you will mark that these are not said to be executors of judgment as Christ is.\* It is to *Him* that God has given all judgment—not necessarily to us. We may have a special task in it, but this is not the work for us, as it seems to me. Hence there is no sword proceeding out of our mouth; nor are the saints or heavenly hosts said to be arrayed in such a sort as the Lord. It is simply said that the glorified are to follow the Lord in victorious power, and nothing more, “clothed in fine linen, white, pure.” Angels we know from other scriptures will be there, but of this we hear nothing here. But “out of *his* mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron.” What makes it the more notable is this, that the rod of iron is promised to us—not the sword. Then there is the reigning power, but not the execution of judgment in this awful fashion which is attributed to the Lord Himself. But He “treadeth the winepress of the fury of the wrath of the Almighty God”—another character of judgment never attributed to the saints, that I know of. “And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

Then follows the proclamation of the angel, and the invitation to the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of all the great ones of the earth. “And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud

\* It is the more strikingly characteristic, because of such language as Ps. cxlix. 6-9, which speaks of all the saints contemplated on earth for the day of Jehovah.

voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, Come, gather yourselves together unto the great supper of God; that ye may eat flesh of kings, and flesh of chiliarchs, and flesh of strong [men], and flesh of horses, and of those that sit on them, and flesh of all, both free and bond, both small and great." And then comes the gathering and the battle. "And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken" (taken alive), "and with him the false prophet that wrought signs in his presence, with which he deceived those that received the mark of the beast, and those that worshipped his image." Thus the second beast is no longer seen as an earthly power, but as a prophet—of course a false prophet. All the energy to mislead men in the presence of the first beast was long in his hands, and now nothing more is spoken of. The spiritual power is wholly in the hands of the false prophet. It will be understood when one says "spiritual" that none is meant save of a wicked kind.

"Alive the two were cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone." Thus eternal judgment was executed at once. They were caught in flagrant treason and rebellion: what further need of any process of judgment whatsoever?

"And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which [sword] proceedeth out of his mouth: and all the birds were filled with their flesh." Their doom was awful, but by no means after the same sort as their two leaders.

Then another and immensely important act is de-

scribed—the binding of Satan. He is no longer to be allowed to prowl about the world ensnaring and destroying. “And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.” It is not therefore his final judgment. The angel “cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal over him, that he should no more deceive the nations, till the thousand years should be completed: after these things he must be loosed a little time.”

And then we come to a most cheering disclosure: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [I saw] the souls of those beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus, and on account of the word of God: and those who had not worshipped the beast, nor his image, and had not received his mark upon their forehead, and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” I do not suppose that many words are required by the present audience to show that we are not to understand the scene as a mere figure of Christianity. There are probably but few, if any, here who do not understand it as the fore-shadow of a real resurrection. In short, it is not tropical language, as when it is said of the prodigal son—“This my son was dead, and is alive again;” or of the restoration of Israel, which is compared to a resurrection from the dead for the rest of the world. Here the vision was of thrones with sitters, and others caused to join them; and the inspired explanation is that it is the first resurrection—the rising

of the just from the dead. Let us look at the different groups that are seen to have part in the first resurrection.

First, "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them." The thrones were already filled. Instead of judgment being executed on them, it was given to them. They themselves were to judge. Who were they? Who are the persons thus invested with judicial authority of so glorious a nature and to reign, as we see later, with Christ? Clearly the same saints whom we have seen first set forth by the elders in heaven, subsequently by the elders and the living creatures, next, by the bride and the living creatures at the marriage-supper, and finally by the armies that followed the Lord out of heaven.

It is no longer a question either of celebrating the ways and counsels of God, or of the war with the beast and king. Accordingly it is another figure. It is reigning. There are thrones filled with certain persons, who reign along with Him. Thus the language of symbol is as definite as any other. There is no lack of precision, but the very reverse. Peculiar energy indeed attaches to symbolic language. But what is also of consequence to observe is, that John saw souls—the souls of those beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus, and on account of the word of God. These are the martyrs of chapter vi., those long since seen under the altar, poured out like burnt-offerings to God. It will be remembered that it was said to them that they must wait. They had cried to the Sovereign ruler to avenge their blood on their foes, but they were told they must wait a little for some others, their fellow-



servants and their brethren, to die as they had. Here accordingly we have them all. For there follows another company of martyrs who suffered when the beast set up his worst and final pretensions. When the second beast appeared, he even strove to put to death those who would not worship the beast, nor pay homage to his image, nor receive his mark. These compose the third class here spoken of.

The first were such as came out of heaven after Christ, being already raised from the dead and glorified. Consequently they sat upon the thrones at once; while the two latter classes, described in the rest of the verse, were still in the separate state—"and the souls." Take this quite simply and literally. It does not mean persons merely, but the souls of beheaded persons. He saw their condition: it was part of the vision.

Here were thrones, and people sat upon them, changed before this into the image of Christ's glory. Then come others in the condition of separate spirits or souls, whom the prophet saw—two different classes of them—those beheaded for the witness of Jesus and the word of God, and those who refused the beast in every form. The proof of the third class should have been given a little more distinctly than in our version. It should not be "*and which had not*," but rather, "*and those* who had not worshipped the beast, nor his image, neither had received his mark upon their forehead, and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Thus such as were in the separate state were reunited to their bodies, and lived and reigned like those who were already on the thrones. They "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

Thus nothing can be simpler or more beautiful than the way in which this verse sums up the Revelation as a whole. The visions of this prophetic book open, not with the rapture of saints to heaven, but the sight of saints already raptured, often before the seer in the visions, but seen always in a complete condition without addition to their number. Accordingly the rapture of the church with the Old Testament saints must have already taken place, all (as I have no doubt) being caught up at the self-same time to be with the Lord above.

We have seen that these follow the Lord out of heaven, and are next seen enthroned. When the Lord takes His own throne, they take theirs by grace. But, further, we find that the saints who had suffered for Christ, during the time that the others were in heaven, are now reunited to their bodies and live, the Lord waiting for the last martyr that He might not leave out one of those who had died for His name. All the sufferers, either in the early persecutions of chapter vi., or in the later persecutions (see chap. xv.) up to Babylon's extinction, were now raised from the dead. They lived, and were put therefore into a place and condition suitable for reigning with Christ, no less than the Old Testament saints and the church itself. Such is the meaning of the verse—"The rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."

Let it be carefully observed here that the first resurrection does not mean all rising exactly at the same moment. This is a mistake. We know that the change of all those caught up takes place in the twinkling of

an eye; but it does not follow that various bodies are not raised at different times. *For certain* there are two great acts of resurrection,—one when the Old Testament saints and the church are caught up to heaven, the other when Satan was bound after the beast and false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire, as well as Babylon judged. Thus (without speaking of the resurrection of the wicked at the close) there were certainly more acts than one, not to speak of the two witnesses put to death and caused to rise after three days and a half, when the spirit of life entered them, and they not only arose, but went up to heaven, as we know. I speak not of anything that might be deemed exceptional or peculiar, but of two acts of raising saints. From the manner in which resurrection is referred to in scripture, does not God leave room for this? “I will raise him up at the last day.” “At the last day” does not mean merely an instant of time. Whether it were the Old Testament saints and the church, or the Apocalyptic saints, if I may so distinguish them, it was in an instant that each were raised, but there was some space between them. What is there to hinder it? There is no expression in the word of God which binds all to rise at the same instant. Those that do rise at the same time rise, no doubt, in a moment; but that there are to be various acts of resurrection is not only not contrary to scripture, but required by its own descriptions. This verse declares it, and there is no other interpretation that can stand even a moment’s fair discussion.

This being so, it adds immense clearness in the understanding of the book. And what shall we say of the wonderful wisdom of the Lord? It is called “the first

resurrection." This does not intimate we have seen that there is only one act of raising, but that all who share that resurrection, whenever raised, are raised before the millennium begins; so that when the reign of Christ takes place, all such have part in the first resurrection, including Christ Himself, raised at least 1800 years before the church; then the church, with the Old Testament saints; then these Apocalyptic saints at any rate some years after. All this gives us a true and just view of the various parties that have a share in the resurrection. "This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

It has been remarked by another, and justly, that the expression "they shall be priests of God and of Christ" summarily puts out of court the interpretation that supposes a figurative resurrection. For it is clear that, though principles might reign, to be priests is quite inconsistent with a mere figure. It is also clearly a personal reward to those who had suffered.

When the thousand years expire, Satan reappears on the scene to the sorrow and ruin of the Gentiles who were not born of God. But it is for the last time, not of the age only but of the various dispensations of God. "And when the thousand years are completed, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to war." This is clearly of moral importance. The glory of the kingdom does not preserve when men in their

natural state are exposed to the adversary. The millennial nations, "the number of whom is as the sand of the sea," fall a prey to Satan.

"And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and encompassed the camp of the saints, and the beloved city." The beloved city is Jerusalem; the camp of the saints, I presume, is a larger circle and embraces all of Israel and the Gentiles who, being converted, refuse Satan's deceit. It is an evident contrast with the state supposed in the wheat-and-tare field of Christendom which is found at the end of the age. Wheat and tares grow together till the process of judgment separates. At the end of the millennium the righteous and the wicked form two distinct arrays, though even then there would appear to be a line drawn between the surrounding camp, and the beloved city Jerusalem on earth, where the Jews were. The unrenewed of the nations are now compassing them with their countless hosts, as if to eat them up like grasshoppers. "And fire came down out of heaven from God, and devoured them. And the devil that deceiveth them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where both the beast and the false prophet [are], and they shall be tormented day and night unto the ages of the ages."

Then follows another scene still more solemn—the most awe-inspiring of all we can contemplate, at the same time full of blessing for the Christian to look onward to as that which will for ever put aside every trace of evil, and vindicate good where man must altogether fail. Here accordingly is seen but one throne. It is the divine judgment of man—eternal judgment.



Even when God was judging providentially in the beginning of the Apocalyptic visions (chap. iv.), associated thrones were seen. When Christ came personally to judge and govern the quick (chapter xx. 4), there were thrones; for the risen saints reign with Him. But now there is but one throne: Christ judges the dead. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away." This is of immense moment doctrinally, because it decisively proves that it is altogether unfounded to assume, as is popularly done, that the Lord only returns at this juncture. In the coming of the Lord all include His coming to the habitable earth. Now manifestly, if the Lord does not come before this, there is no world to come to; for the earth and heavens are fled. The common notion, therefore, that the coming of the Lord is at this point is an evident fallacy upon the face of this scripture that describes it, not to speak of others elsewhere. It is not a syllogism that is wanted or that can satisfy here: only require, only believe, the word of God. A single verse dispels clouds of arguments. "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled; and place was not found for them." I admit that afterwards no doubt the new heaven and the new earth are seen; but who contends that this is the sphere to which the Lord comes? To this earth He is coming, and not merely to the new earth in the eternal state. To the same world in which He suffered, according to the scriptures, He will come back. But for the eternal judgment heaven and earth are fled away; and then we see the new and eternal universe. Hence He must have come back previously

to both. With this agrees His coming out of heaven in judgment of the earth, described in Rev. xix. He came to the world, and avenged His people on the beast and the false prophet with the kings and their armies; and after that the risen saints reign with Him over it a thousand years. I say not *on* but *over* the earth. He with the glorified saints will have their home on high, but none the less shall they reign over this very world for the allotted time.

Then, as we have seen, comes the final test of the nations of the earth after that kingdom has run its course, and the devil let loose once more deceives flesh and blood after the analogy of all other dispensations. That age of visible glory is inefficacious to change the heart of man, though in the absence of the enemy and the controlling presence of the great King, they render feigned obedience for a long while. It can govern and bless but not convert man. Even the proclamation of the grace of God is powerless save it be brought home by the quickening energy of His own Spirit. In short, no testimony can avail, no work, power, or glory without the word of God applied by the Spirit of God. But in this is shown—what it is of importance to see—the true nature of the kingdom or millennial reign. “That day” does not mean a time when everybody will be converted, but when the Lord Jesus will govern righteously—when overt evil will be judged, and good be sustained perfectly for a thousand years. When any wrong is done, it will be dealt with. As far as the display of government goes, it is according to God morally, and for His glory, though I deny not for a moment that there are elements of evil which are never allowed, but kept

under if not expelled. But that the heart of man even so is not renewed becomes manifest, when Satan at the close deceives all that are not converted; and these, as we are told, are countless "as the sand of the sea."

Do not wonder at the vast numbers, or at their defection. The thousand years of peace and plenty will have given occasion for an ever-growing population, spite of a world thinned by divine judgments which open that era. It is to be supposed that it will far exceed anything yet seen on the face of the earth. At the beginning there will have been carnage, as we know, among both the western powers and the eastern powers. In fact, we may say, all nations will be desolated by judgments of one kind or another; but for all this the world proceeding for a thousand years with every outward blessing, and the most admirable government administered by the blessed Lord Himself, will issue in the teeming and prosperous races of mankind. It will be a state of nature unexampled for the fruits of the earth and the enjoyment of all that God has made here below. Consequently there will be an increase in population such as never has been approached since the world was made, yet it afterwards appears, that Satan will not fail to turn the masses of the nations into one vast rebellion against the objects of God's special favour on the earth—the saints—wherever they may be, and the beloved city of Israel, as we have seen.

Then comes not the destruction only of these rebels by divine judgment, but the dissolution of heaven and earth. And Jesus sits on the great white throne. It is the judgment of the dead as such, who now rise and give account of their deeds. All the dead are there

who had not part in the first resurrection. The nature of the case exempts of course the saints of the millenium;\* and this very simply, because they are never said to die at all. There is no scriptural reason to infer that any saint dies during the thousand years, but rather the contrary. Scripture is positive in Isaiah lxxv. that death during the millennium only comes as a specific judgment because of open rebellion. When a person dies, it will be a positive curse from God; if he die even a hundred years old, it will be like a baby dying now. Man converted will then not merely reach the natural term—if I may so say—of a thousand years, but pass that bound. If alive before the thousand years, he will live after the thousand years; in fact, literally he will never die, though I do not doubt, on general principles, that the saints of the millennial earth will be changed at the very time when the heavens and earth disappear. Of course they will be preserved through that crisis in some sort of way suitable to divine wisdom. God has not told us how, nor is it our business. He has reserved the matter, though not without enough to guide our thoughts, as we have seen. It is one of those cases which every now and then appear where God checks and reproves our foolish curiosity, as He alone knows how to do perfectly. “Flesh and blood,” we know, “cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” According to the general scope of scripture, then, we may be quite sure that these saints, kept during this universal dis-

\* None, however, can be exempt from being manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, or from giving an account of all done in the body. But no believer comes into judgment. (John v. 24 compared with Rom. xiv. and 2 Cor. v.)

solution of the atmospheric heaven and the earth, will be translated to "the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness," in a condition new and meet for the eternal state into which they are ushered. Let others speculate, if they will: I am persuaded that he who essays to conceive the details is merely striving to draw a bow beyond the power of man. For I am not aware that any scripture treats of the subject, beyond laying down principles such as we have sought to apply to the case.

"And the dead were judged," but not out of the book of life, which has nothing to do with judgment. "The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Why then is the book of life mentioned? Not because any of their names were written therein, but in proof that they were not. The book of life will confirm what is gathered from the books. If the books proclaim the evil works of the dead that stand before the throne, the book of life offers no defence on the score of God's grace. Scripture records no name whatever among those judged written there. There was the sad register of undeniable sin on the one side; there was no writing of the name on the other side. Thus, whether the books or the book be examined, all conspire to declare the justice, the solemn but most affecting righteousness, of God's final irrevocable sentence. They were judged every man according to their works. "And if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." Thus the only use that seems made of the book is negative and exclusive. Not that any of those judged (and the scene described is solely a resurrection



of judgment) are said to be written there : we are shown rather that they were *not* found in that book.

Again, death and hades are said to come to their end, personified as enemies. "And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." Thus was concluded all dealing on the Lord's part with both soul and body, and all that pertains to either. The race was now in the resurrection state either for good or for evil ; and thus it must be for ever. Death and hades, which had so long been executioners in a world where sin reigned, and were still doing their occasional office where righteousness is to reign, themselves disappear where all traces of sin are consigned for ever.

In the first eight verses of chapter xxi. we have the new heaven and the new earth, but besides, awful to say, the lake of fire. Indeed it must be so, because, as we read in the end of the last chapter, there the lost were cast. But still it is a very solemn fact to read, and that which we are bound to preach—that even in the perfect state of eternity, while there is the brightness of the heaven and of the earth into which no evil can enter, you have all the evil that ever has been—all the wicked of every clime and of every age cast into the fixed condition of eternal judgment in the lake of fire.

Observe another very important fact. All the dispensational names of God disappear. It is only God and man now. There is nothing more to hear of nations ; nothing more to do with separate countries, kindreds, or tongues. It is the eternal state ; and also, in fact, the fullest description of that state which is furnished in the Bible. But a very different point of interest is to be observed.

Although there is such a levelling of human distinctions, and men have to do directly with God—that is men raised from the dead or in their changed condition—we still see the holy Jerusalem—"the holy city, new Jerusalem," separate from the rest of those that fill the new heaven and earth. This is of great importance, because if the new Jerusalem be, as I have no doubt it is, the bride the Lamb's wife, then we have her separate condition asserted in eternity. "I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God" (alluding to this very city) "[is] with men." That is, the tabernacle of God is regarded as a separate object, no doubt associated with men, but not confounded with them. Men are not regarded as composing this tabernacle; they co-exist. "The tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

All things are thus made new; and, further, "these words are faithful." Nothing more is to be done. "And he said unto me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be to him God, and he shall be son to me. But to the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part [is] in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Here occurs a remarkable change in the sequence of the visions, though easily understood; for it must be evident that there is nothing to follow this in point of time. We have just seen that it is the eternal state. Consequently, here we must most unquestionably go back to be shown an important object in the prophecy which could not, without interrupting its course, have been described before. In short, it is as we saw in chapter xvii., after Babylon had been brought before us in the course of the prophecy. We had seen Babylon twice: first, in the circle of God's warnings and testimonies; and then as the object of God's judgment under the seven bowls. Then we have a description of Babylon given. It would have been incongruous to bring in that long description before, because this must have interrupted the flow of the prophetic stream.

Exactly the same thing is repeated here, and what makes it more apparent is the similarity of the introduction on each occasion. "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." Who does not see that this is precisely analogous to the verse which opened the description of Babylon? I take it, therefore, that God intended this analogy to be noted by us; that it is not a pursuance of the prophecy, but a description of the holy city previously named, just as the other was a description of the corrupt city, whose judgment had been announced. We had Babylon with a spuriously ecclesiastical but a really murderous character, and at the same time guilty of corruption with the kings of the earth. Here is seen

the holy city coming down out of heaven from God, which is declared to be the bride, the Lamb's wife, in the plainest contrast with the great harlot. Yet to this heavenly city, after Christ comes, the kings of the earth bring their offerings and their homage; but there is no excitement of the nations, no filthiness of fornication, no abominations, no blood-guiltiness. In short, Babylon, the disgusting counterpart of the holy city, in earthly ambition seeks the kings and the masses for her own present objects, while the other suffers now and will reign then. The one therefore throws much light upon the other.

But what I particularly call your attention to is the exceeding importance of heeding the retrospect at the bride, or new Jerusalem here, and the consequent removal of the difficulty caused by taking the last vision of this book as part of the prophetic series which begins in chapter xix. Not so. It is an added digression for the purpose of describing an object already named passingly in the foregoing series, which closes at chap. xxi. 8. As chapter xvii. was a descriptive digression, so is the portion from chapter xxi. 9. The account given of Babylon in chapter xvii. does not follow chapters xiv. or xvi. in point of prophetic time, but differs from them in structure. It gives a retrogressive account of Babylon's character, and shows how it morally compelled the divine judgment. So here a description is given of the bride, the Lamb's wife, and we learn how it is that God will use her for unmeasured goodness and blessing and glory in the millennium, as the devil during this age has used Babylon to accomplish his wicked plans here below. Just as the city of

man's confusion was seen in her vile, degraded, and degrading relations with the beast, this city is seen in her pure and glorious relations with the Lamb.

"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in [the] spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." It is not into a wilderness the prophet is carried, but he is set on "a mountain great and high," and shown—not the great, but the holy city Jerusalem. The great city was either guilty Jerusalem or Babylon. This city is seen now as the holy vessel of divine power for governing the earth during the millennium, "having the glory of God: and her brightness was like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

Then follows a description of the wall, gates, foundations, and general position. "Having a wall great and high, having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names inscribed, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel." It was important, just because it is the bride, the Lamb's wife, to show that angels are there, and further, that Israel is not forgotten. The very name indeed shows something similar; not of course that the church can ever be earthly. Still God does not forget His ways with His people; and the angels here are only in the quality of porters, if we may so speak; they are at the gates. And as for the twelve tribes of Israel, they are merely written there, nothing more. No hint whatever is given



that they constitute the city, but there is the inscription of their names outside. That city will be a constant remembrancer of those who went before restored Israel here below, as undoubtedly it will be used for their blessing during the millennium, but not for theirs only. We shall find, on the contrary, its aspect is toward the universe, yet is there the special place of Israel; and quite right it is that it should be so. "On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." These would appear to be (save Judas Iscariot, of course) the twelve apostles that were peculiarly associated with Christ in His suffering path on the earth. God is sovereign. It is not meant that he who was more honoured in service than any of the twelve, he whom the Lord used for bringing out the church of the heavenly places, will not have his own most singular dignity in this glorious scene. Still God acts in a wisdom far above man, and holds to His principles even there. The twelve apostles of the Lamb will accordingly have their own special place. We can fairly trust God that He will not give a worse place to Paul; yet I do not think that this is his place.

"And he that spoke with me had a golden reed as a measure, that he might measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth four-square, and its length is as much as the breadth." Thus there is a completeness and perfection about it suited to its present character.

Afterwards we come to the description of itself,—of

its wall, its building, its foundations, and its gates. Here it is the city described in itself, on which we need not now enlarge.

Further, a negative point of great importance is presented by the seer. "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb." This was no lack. On the contrary, it proved the immediateness of communion. The temple would suppose a medium. The absence of a temple is therefore no loss but a gain for this city. It furnishes material for a contrast between the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly city, because if there be one thing more remarkable than another in Ezekiel's description, it is the temple. But here there is none; a temple is for the earth. The heavenly city, which is the full expression of blessedness on high, has no temple because it is all a temple. "The Lord God is the temple of it, and the Lamb," as far as we can speak of any. "And the city has no need of the sun, nor of the moon, that they should shine for it." This too must not be viewed as if it were a loss. As for the earthly land and city, the moon will have her light increased to that of the sun, and the sun shall be sevenfold. But here there is neither; and this again is an evidence of gain, not of loss. "For the glory of God enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof." Creature lights are gone.

After "the nations" in verse 24 omit the words "of them which are saved." You must with the best authorities leave out this addition, if you would have the true force of the verse. It is a wholly unwarranted interpolation. "The nations shall walk in the light of it." Any one of spiritual judgment can see that it

should not be "nations of them which are saved." What would be the meaning, if so read? We can understand a remnant saved out of one or more nations; but who ever heard of "nations of them which are saved"? It is altogether unfeasible, and it shows how carelessly we read the Bible that people are not stopped by such an expression. The fact is, in the very best authorities it does not exist at all. The "saved" is a term which, so far from belonging to the nations, is expressly applied to the Jewish remnant when it is a technical term. But "nations of them which are saved," is a most anomalous expression, and betrays man as the author of it.

"And the nations shall walk in the light of it." It is plain that they are not *in* this city. "The kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour unto it"—not *into* but *unto*. That is, it is simply an expression of the homage that they pay. "And the nations shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour unto it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for night shall not be there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations unto it. And there shall in nowise enter into it anything that defileth, nor making abomination and a lie: but only those written in the book of life of the Lamb." Moral unfitness has its just censure; but sovereign grace must be asserted also.

Then we have another glorious description. "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." It is not now lightnings and thunders and voices. These were simply the characters of provisiona<sup>1</sup>

judgment that filled the interval after the church was gone, and before the reign with Christ. But when Christ and the church peacefully reign, such is the imagery that suits—"a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the Broadway of it, and of the river, on this side and on that, [the] tree of life,"—bearing not merely as the original one did, but now according to the fulness of the provision of God's grace for man, for man in glory first, but for man on the earth also, but for man in glory—"producing twelve fruits, in each month yielding its fruit: and the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations." Man on the earth has his portion in the goodness of a God who is manifesting His kingdom. "And no curse shall be any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him." All this description closes in verse 5.

After that we have the admonitions to the end of this book. On these I may say but a very few words.

Verse 6 commends these sayings afresh. And the coming of the Lord is urged in connection with it. "Behold I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book." Then again the character of it, as derived from Christianity having already taken its place, is asserted. "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book." In Daniel's time, and even to Daniel himself, the book was sealed. The old oracles were sealed then: not so John's. "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is near." In Daniel's time it was not at hand. To the church the end is always

near. In her own course, and in the matters of her portion, the church does not know time at all. Everything that belongs to the body of Christ is unearthly and unworldly. The church is heavenly; and in heaven there are no times nor seasons. There may be lights of the heaven to mark times and seasons for the earth, and again on the earth. But the church consists of souls called out from the earth, and is not of the world: consequently to the church the time is always at hand. When Christ at God's right hand was announced, even from the very beginning, He was ready to judge the quick and the dead. He remains in that condition of readiness from the time when He sat at God's right hand till the present. The church goes on according to the will of the Lord, who might according to His own purpose lengthen or abridge the space. It is entirely in His hand, and in none other's. Whereas for the Jew, there are necessary dates and momentous changes that must take place; and hence, as Daniel represents the Jew, we have the difference kept up. To the Christian this book is not sealed. All is opened, and this because we have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us; "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." Therefore we find in connection with the book a most solemn warning. "Let him that is unrighteous be unrighteous still: and let the filthy be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." When the hour comes that is spoken of here, it is not for us, but for those who will be found after we are gone. All is then fixed. There will be no time for seeking mercy, as it were: whatever the state in which the



Lord at His coming will find us, all is closed up and fixed. Accordingly, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me." We see that it is in connection with the foregoing—not merely His coming for us who will keep the sayings of it, but for those whom He will find here below—"to give to each as his work is."

Further, after this Jesus introduces Himself, as well as sends His angel. "I Jesus sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright the morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come: and let him that heareth say, Come: and let him that is athirst come: let him that will take the water of life freely." Thus the name of Christ, not merely as the root and the offspring of David, but as the bright morning star, calls out responsively the heart of the church, and this too under the guiding activity of the Holy Ghost. The church cannot hear of Him as the bright morning star without at once desiring that He should come. She does not, it is true, say, "Come quickly." This would not be fitting for the church nor the Christian. Patience or endurance of hope is what becomes us. But it is blessed that *He* says, "I come quickly;" and it is only Christ who in scripture ever says so. But we as properly say, "Come." We desire that He should come quickly, but we leave this to Him, because we know His love, and can trust Him. We know that if He tarries, it is not that He is "slack concerning His promise," but that "His longsuffering brings salvation to many." And who would defraud either the soul of salvation, or the Lord of showing it?

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come." It is to

Jesus. To whom else could they say it? The bride breathes out this word to the bridegroom; and the Holy Ghost it is that gives strength to her desire that He should come. But there is a message also for others. There is a word to him that hears. "Let him that heareth say, Come." He is urged to take up the same cry. If you are a believer, do not be afraid, even if you know but little; for the Lord neither forgets nor slights those who may be comparatively unintelligent. He has, I think, exactly that class in view when He sanctions the calling him who hears to say "Come." The bride represents those that are spoken of in the normal possession and enjoyment of their privileges. There are many who are not so; but the Lord does not forget them. "Let him that heareth," then, "say, Come." If they have only heard His voice, this after all is the incalculable boon; yea, it is the turning-point of all blessing. It is not the enjoyment of all, but it is the hinge on which all depends. It is the way to all, if it be not the actual entrance into and enjoyment of it. "Let him that heareth," then, be encouraged to "say, Come." There is nothing in Jesus to harm him; there is everything to bless; there is Himself to be enjoyed, even if they have failed in the full knowledge of it here below.

But then while there is such a call to Christ, while the believer is not to be afraid, but to call on the Lord to come, the church does not forget those that are poor sinners, let them be deeply conscious of it, or let them be those that are only made willing by the grace of God (which is the feeblest expression of the sinner's need, just as you have the feeblest expression of the saint in

the previous call). So we find the Lord has room for all that is the fruit of His own grace only,—for the appeal of grace, even when there is not the answer to it. Yet grace despised necessarily ends in judgment. “And let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Then the book concludes after a solemn warning against either adding to or taking from its contents. “He that testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” “Surely I come quickly.” After so long a tarrying how blessed! After so many sorrows, trials, difficulties, dangers, how sweet to have such a word, and to know that He who speaks is the holy and the true, and surely about to come in the faithfulness of His love! He will not fail to take up the gage He has given our hearts. He is coming, and coming soon for us. a

May our hearts answer freely to His word of love and truth with our “Amen.” His grace be with all!

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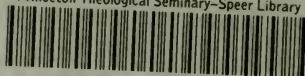


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